
The future of electronic entertainment issue#139
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Kingdom Under Fire, D
Reviewed: Silent Hill 4, D
Vib Ripple, Perimeter, Es
Future Tactics, Mashed,
Interviewed: Keiji Inafun
Shadow Of Rome and
Plus: Never-ending MMC
PlayStation versus UK ga







Videogame fashions, just like any other, routinely come and go. Only a few years ago, the *Tekken* series was synonymous with the PlayStation brand, and indeed the first sequel was one of the most frequently played games in the **Edge** office, yet it has since been eclipsed by the *Soul Calibur* and *Virtua Fighter* series to the point that some of today's console gamers might not even recognise a character as charismatic as Jin Kazama. The fourth instalment, one of the first round of PS2 disappointments, did not help *Tekken*'s chances of being that rare beast capable of transcending market whims (think *Gran Turismo*, for example), and Namco has since, perhaps wisely, left it well alone. But now it's back. Its creators have taken a long, hard look at what went wrong last time out and are focusing on bringing back what made the series such a draw in the first place. Top of the list appears to be simplicity. Read what else is on the agenda in this month's feature (p52).

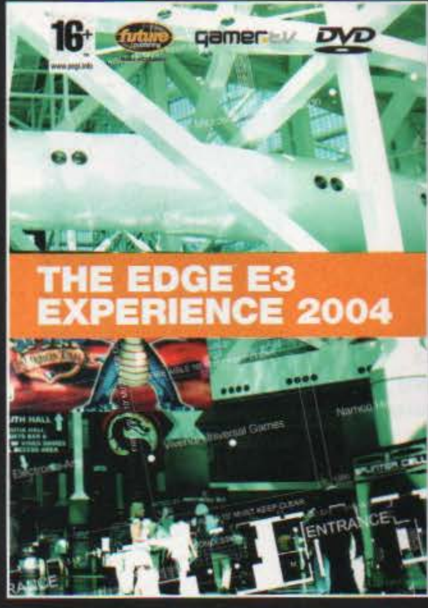
Simplicity and videogaming are unusual bedfellows nowadays. As the charge continues towards more detailed scenarios populated by pseudo-intelligent characters and driven by increasingly complex missions, the results often go awry. Concepts that once looked so attractive and tenable on paper end up as a tangle of unfinished concepts and part-realised dreams. It's a topic discussed in this month's reviews section, and no doubt one we'll find ourselves having to address many more times in the future.

At the other end of the spectrum are games like *Mashed* (p101), whose unabashed intention of keeping it simple pays real dividends when it comes to actually playing the game, not just drinking in some horribly expensive cut-scenes.

But if we're going to have that cake then we're damn well going to feast on it, too. We want *Tekken 5* to remind us why *Tekken 2* was once such a big deal. And we want, say, a new *Elite* to redefine the wider boundaries of gaming. Wanting it all has never been unfashionable, of course.



Features



Also in the bag: the **Edge** E3 Experience 2004 DVD











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directory august

the 'Tekken it seriously again' issue



















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"I'll shove that bat up your ass and turn you into a popsicle"

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



PSP photography: Nick Wilson

Japanese developers voice PSP concerns

Hot on the heels of a stellar showing in Los Angeles comes talk from Japanese developers of doubt over Sony's ability to deliver

PSX photography: **Martin Thompson**

It may have stolen the show at E3, but PSP has been met with consternation in Japan, where anticipant game makers have cited final screen quality, development costs, and, predictably, battery life as areas of concern for the platform.

A source close to Sony has claimed that the display technology on show at E3 currently costs around ¥70,000 (£350) per unit, clearly a prohibitive amount for a massmarket device. The E3 prototype's screen has also been cited as massive drain on the power source; it is said that the finished hardware will therefore make use of a lower-quality display system, "similar to today's Clie Palm OS PDA."

Concerns over PSP dev costs stem from the platform's power: some Japanese codeshops see its PS2-style capabilities as a significant risk, since projects will naturally require PS2-style team sizes and budgets. This is leading to resistance in greenlighting projects, and most Japanese developers working on PSP titles are believed to have just one title in full-scale development.

However, while they have adopted a wait-and-see stance toward Sony's hardware, several developers have said they are looking closely at Nintendo's DS, deeming it "less sexy but much more financially and technically viable," thanks to its N64-style capabilities. Others are looking for previous PS2 titles to revive on PSP as an obvious way of addressing development costs (conversions could be managed within two months, they suggest), but claim that Sony is discouraging this approach.

And then there's the battery. Developers are said to be plain irritated by Sony's lack of concrete information in this area. In the absence of firm battery-life data, they are concerned about how they should be designing their PSP games, specifically with regard to level length and save points.

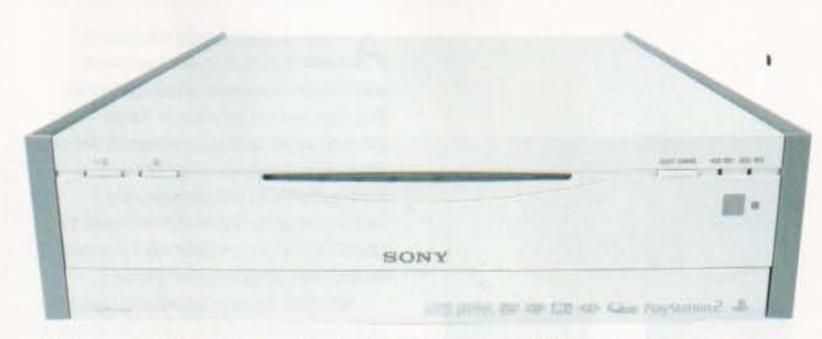
Movie studios, meanwhile, are said to be pressuring Sony to ensure that PSP will be capable of playing back a minimum of two hours and 30 minutes on a single battery charge, and it seems likely that they will get their way: the hardware's media-handling capabilities are, after all, being touted as one of its key strengths.

A number of Japanese developers apparently disagree, however. With 78 per cent of mobile phone bills in the territory accounted for by email-sending charges, they believe that the comms facility offered by Nintendo's upcoming handheld is a more attractive hardware proposition than the ability to play back movies from UM discs.

Another area of developer favour for Nintendo DS is its backward compatibility. PSP, by comparison, will be attempting to romance consumers from a standing start.

Having enjoyed such positive feedback at E3, PSP's current reception in Japan is clearly an issue of importance. It's difficult to see how a PlayStation-branded device could garner such cautious regard – until you consider that Japanese developers have just seen Sony's other recent PS hardware, PSX, discontinued in the territory. Only 100,000 units made it to market, and although Sony's overall DVD-recordable share stands at 550,000, it trails market leader Panasonic, which has shifted 1.7m devices in Japan.

Several Japanese developers have said that they are looking closely at Nintendo's DS, deeming it "less sexy but more financially viable"



PSX was part of Sony's attempt to dominate the DVD-recordable market in Japan, but it has been responsible for less than a fifth of the company's sales in this buoyant area



Japanese reports claim that the final PSP display will be of a lower quality than this E3 prototype's, but Sony is claiming that the opposite will be true

Sony responds

We contacted Sony Europe for its views on the situation among Japanese developers, and this is what **Phil Harrison** had to say:

"The comments about the screen are entirely without foundation. In fact, the situation's quite the opposite – we've made some enhancements to the viewing angle of the display since its showing at E3. As for cost, that's entirely speculation. We've never discussed cost of goods in our hardware. In fact, I shouldn't even dignify that particular piece of speculation with a response.

"As for battery life, that's obviously something that's down to system design and also game design in each instance. We stand by the predictions we've previously made in terms of battery performance. And we're working with developers to make sure they get the most out of the system's power. That's always the case with our hardware.

"As for discouraging certain types of game on PSP, we haven't discouraged *any* type of game for the platform. But I would say that developers are being encouraged to think about the difference between opportunity-based gaming and session gaming."

***Hard Corps*, *World Rally Championship* and *Wipeout* are coming to PSP, which shows that Sony isn't discouraging updates of existing IP on the platform**





No surprises at Sega show

Coin-op giant mounts annual private event but fails to set the arcade gaming scene alight in the run up to Naomi 3

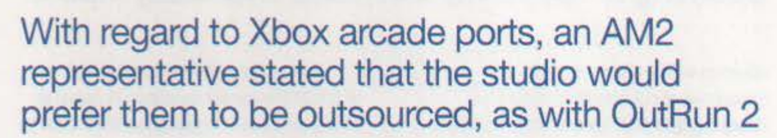
As was overwhelmingly the case at February's AOU show, there were precious few traditional arcade games at Sega's recent private show in Tokyo. Among the increasingly extravagant day-glo distractions it seemed only AM2 was holding the torch, debuting playable versions of *Virtua Fighter 4 Final Tuned* and *Quest Of D* (though neither were surprises, having been announced in February).

VF4 Final Tuned is the second update to VF4 – following *Evolution* – and introduces a Challenge Mode, in which the player chooses a branching path through a series of matches, much like the *OutRun* games' route maps. Good performances in the Challenge Mode earn the player bonus items, a unique nickname based on analysis of their fighting style, and 'Fighting Money' to purchase online rewards via Sega's VF.NET service. The character roster remains unchanged, but as the title suggests, movesets have been tweaked and the AI improved in order to provide the definitive challenge to dedicated followers of *Virtua* fighting.

Quest of D, AM2's first trading card-based networked game, had a more imposing presence. Running on five Xbox-based Chihiro boards, the hulking unit features four personal cabinets linked to a central server that sports a huge flatscreen display. Surprisingly, *D*'s gameplay is not the straightforward card battling of sister machines, but a fast-paced dungeon crawl in the spirit of *Dark Alliance*. Movement and combat are controlled with a joystick and buttons, while a touchscreen allows the player to drag and drop cards from inventory into play or vice versa. As you can imagine, managing both the stick and the touchscreen in the heat of mass combat proved challenging for some showgoers.



While we were attempting to master *Final Tuned*, our photographer was snapping cabinets like these. At least you can't say a feet-based diversion lacks innovation



With regard to Xbox arcade ports, an AM2 representative stated that the studio would prefer them to be outsourced, as with OutRun 2

The absence of other major titles could be attributed to *VF4 Final Tuned* marking the Naomi 2 generation's last hurrah. Questioned on its successor, the tentatively named Naomi 3 board, Sega suggested it might be presented at the year-end JAMMA show – slightly earlier than observers were predicting at the AOU event. Traditionally, new Sega boards are accompanied by a new *Virtua Fighter* title, but it was indicated that a potential *VF5* would break this trend, in order for *VF4 Final Tuned* to maximise its run in the arcades.

Chihiro's golf squad

The other Sega studios are reportedly preparing games for a second private show scheduled for June or July, although again only AM2's titles were referred to. At least four are under development, including two currently location testing in Tokyo: *Sega Golf Club Network Pro Tour*, an online fourplayer golf title, and *G.H.O.S.T Squad*, a lightgun game with multi-route progression and a mechanic that rewards successive head shots. Both run on Chihiro, and it is assumed the unannounced titles will also be developed for that system, apparently in an effort to offset the Chihiro's individual expense by manufacturing boards in bulk.



Sega continues to dominate in Japan's novelty attraction sector, and, as well as the company's arcade games, this is the sort of content that proved so desirable to Sammy





Final Tuned's new moves should be incentive enough for the *VF4* hardcore to buy into it. And there are plenty of them in Japan, where the game is still massive





A starter kit for *Quest Of D* contains five cards, and the machine will dispense one more after each play. Collecting them all will prove pricey for dedicated players



With regard to Xbox home ports, an AM2 representative stated that the studio would prefer them to be outsourced, as with *OutRun 2*, rather than handle the conversions in-house.

If there was any foreshadowing of the imminent Sammy buyout, it wasn't in the sense of this being the twilight of the Sega circus before the pachinko-and-Atomiswave future detractors predict. Rather, Sammy hosted its own private show on the opposite side of Tokyo, an overt gesture that both companies would retain their independence (possibly as much to assuage doubts inside Sega as those of the public). In addition, the advanced development of Naomi 3 suggests that the only contribution Sega will be making to Atomiswave will be the branding – but it's a question that, as with many others raised by the sleepwalking giant's show, remains unanswered.



If you look really closely, you can just about make out *Quest Of D* cards being traded by arcade operators taking breaks

CUTTINGS



Creatives make history

Following on from its Total War engine's outing on the BBC series Time Commanders, The Creative Assembly has collaborated with the History Channel for a new series, Decisive Battles, premiering on the US network in July. Unlike Time Commanders' realtime usage of the engine, Decisive Battles features prerecorded scenarios that factually recreate historical conflicts. In addition to the obvious benefits of scale provided by a virtual cast of thousands, the History Channel is apparently hoping to entice the gaming demographic – and any success may see some of the tarnish chipped off the edutainment genre.

Vivendi's bad moon

In a difficult month for the company, Vivendi has announced 350 North American job cuts. The figure includes losses associated with last month's closure of long-standing Vivendi studios Papyrus (*NASCAR Racing*) and Impressions (*Lords Of The Realm*). It also marks the end of Sierra's surviving office at Bellevue. Vivendi was quick to stress that the job losses do not affect Blizzard, and were undertaken as part of a process intended to, in the words of **Bruce Hack**, chief executive of Vivendi Universal Games, "improve our operating effectiveness and profitability." The cuts follow the news that *StarCraft: Ghost* is delayed until at least 2005, and that former Vivendi Universal chairman, Jean-Marie Messier, has been placed under investigation by French police for buying back 21 million of Vivendi's own shares during market slumps after the attacks of September 11.

ELSPA climbs second Summit

Top UK industry players converge on London to expound benefits of new technologies, making better games, and holding back on going forward



ELSPA's second annual Games Summit took place on June 8-9 at the Mondrien Hotel, Picadilly. The event, entitled 'New Technologies And New Strategic Directions: Maximising Profit And Managing Risk In A Convergent Entertainment World', was designed to bring together leaders and luminaries to discuss ways in which the industry can move forward. And though the two-day conference saw more than its fair share of self-promotion disguised as analysis, it demonstrated that many of the business's key players share similar ideals when it comes to the future of gaming.

Roger Bennett, director general of ELSPA and pipe-smoking dignitary to the UK gaming industry, kicked off the event with a swift no-nonsense welcome, thanking the early-morning, slightly sweaty attendees for their attentive presence on this, the most sweltering day of the year, and promising a host of revealing lectures as their reward. In fact, Activision president Kathy Vrabeck's opening keynote set the tone for the conference, interpreting the lengthy title thus: make better games, make broader games, and make games on systems that exist today, not tomorrow.

All noble and worthy ambitions, we agree, and ones reinforced again and again throughout the conference. But there's a difference between standing in front of your peers and espousing the benefits of a better quality of electronic entertainment and putting into practice policies that make the dream happen. It's the job of a conference speaker to talk a good game, of course, and many did; but our scepticism means we have a hard time believing the future will be as fair and rational as several demanded.

For example, representatives from the three major hardware manufacturers implored the assembled developers and publishers to stay with the current generation, each insisting their present hardware had so much left to give. However, while that policy makes financial sense for all sectors of the industry, the PS2's head start last time around gave it such an advantage that it's hard to see Microsoft and Nintendo holding back this time, whatever their stated aims to the contrary.

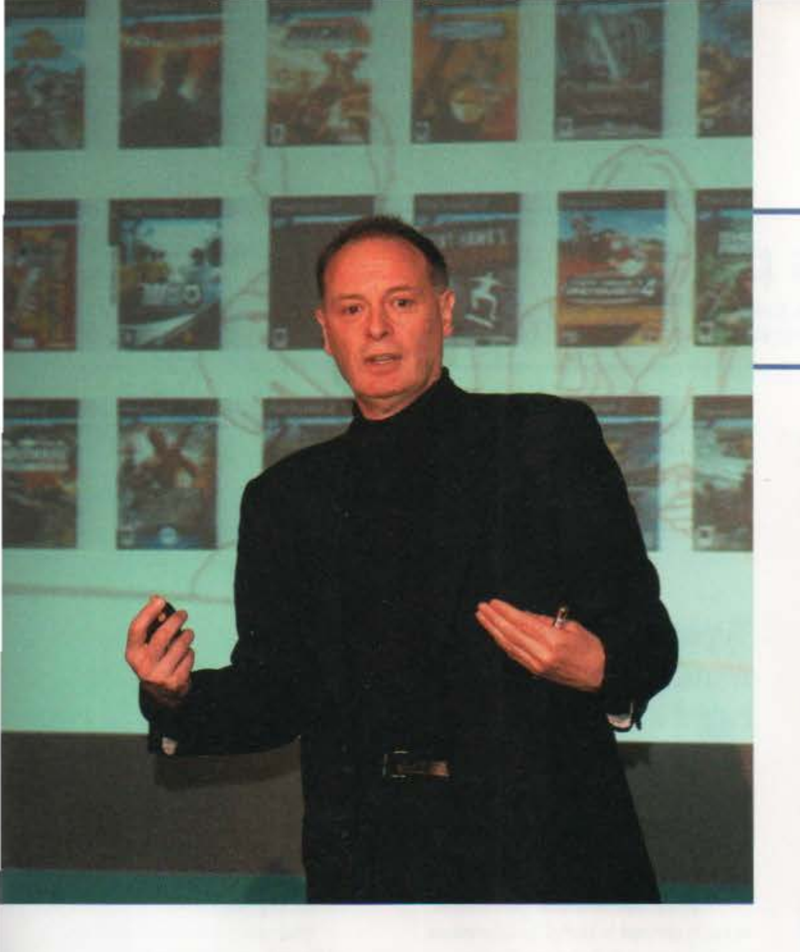
Representatives from the three major hardware manufacturers implored the developers and publishers to stay with the current generation

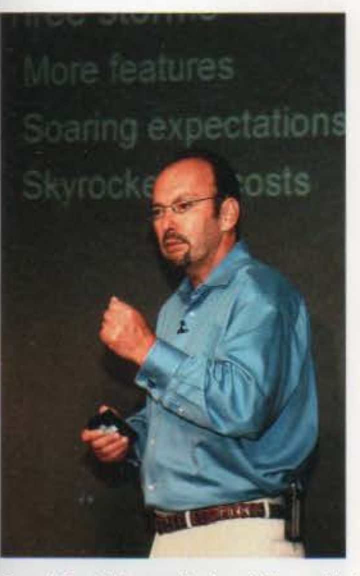
That said, the now-familiar stepped-rollercoaster graphs that so clearly illustrate the industry's vicious cycles were near-constant fixtures on the event's screens, and projected fortunes for PS2 indicate that it has several years left. That was the focus of Sony COO **David Reeves**' speech, of course. Despite the programmed title, 'Using marketing and consumer insights to expand the demographic – a new pillar for growth', Reeves' presentation might as well have been called 'Sony: we really are the best, aren't we?' Under the guise of demonstrating the company's diversity in development he provided showreels for *Killzone*, *GT4*, and *The Getaway 2*: "Three completely different demographics." That these games focus on, respectively, guns, cars, and cars and guns, and yet can still be held up as an example of diversity, seems absolutely indicative of gaming's malaise. But few seemed very bothered.

Reeves' concession to the conference theme was to give live demonstrations of more Sony products in the shape of *SingStar*, *Athens 2004* and *EyeToy: Chat*. It was the *EyeToy* franchise that won high praise from other speakers at the event, with one particularly fascinating graph revealing how the peripheral smashed the traditional gaming demographic, with users of all ages buying a PlayStation2 just to play with it. Perhaps that's why the industry is suddenly priapic for innovation; certainly David Gosen's DS musings and Peter Moore's emphasis on Xbox Live's video cha



Despite being the hottest day of the year so far, the delegates listened enthusiastically to the speeches and presentations delivered by industry representatives including Nintendo Europe's David Gosen (top left), who called for a slowdown in the rush towards new consoles







Sony's David Reeves (top) and Microsoft's Peter Moore (above left) spoke of gaming crossing demographics, while Activision's Kathy Vrabeck wants to make better games



Sony's *Singstar* was put through its paces for the benefit of anyone who hadn't yet witnessed its charms

implied that they think the way to expand gaming is not through new-spun versions of traditional paradigms but by offering completely new concepts.

Introducing another new concept to a sceptical audience was Kevin Bacchus, president and COO of Infinium. His intention to give a demonstration of Infinium hardware was scuppered by the machine being damaged in transit, but he still provided an effective rundown of the Phantom, its capabilities and its keyboard. What wasn't said was perhaps just as revealing, the ex-Microsoft employee still refusing to reveal exactly what users will get for their monthly subscription fee. The analogy drawn was 'basic cable', which we speculate means access to a handful of old games and demos of new ones.

Of course, business conferences aren't just about the presentations, which rarely reveal anything from cagey competitors, but about bringing people together and creating community. ELSPA's recent reinvigoration has certainly done that, and the Games Summit provided another opportunity for all parties involved to embark on some handy profile-boosting self-promotion and some forceful networking. Receiving the biggest profile boost of all is ELSPA itself: its next big date is in August, at the EIGF. And after that, a summit of a different kind looms on the horizon: September sees a party of ELSPA members embark on a charity climb of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Mobile gaming expo gathers pace

An upscaling in size sees Mobile Entertainment Market '04 deemed a success, while usage data paints a changing picture for phone gaming's demographic



In the absence of multiplayer *Quake* right now, mobile types settle for playing pool

If the market for mobile gaming can be measured by the size of this year's exhibition at MEM04 – the Mobile Entertainment Market – then there's been a huge improvement compared with last year. Despite being held at the same location as last year – the Islington Design Centre – the show took over the main floor instead of being confined to the balconies.

In addition to the main exhibition, three parallel tracks of talks covered all areas of mobile entertainment, not just games. Gilles Corbett of In-fusio, the French mobile publisher and gaming technology firm, shared the results of some insightful research into mobile gaming. Notable conclusions were that typical mobile gaming sessions are 20 minutes long and most likely to be played on a Saturday night while in bed rather than while waiting for a bus; while the number of female gamers is 22 per cent down from the almost 50 per cent recorded 18 months ago. The current concentration of console-orientated licences was suggested as a possible reason for this unfortunate downward trend.

While there were no hard stats for gaming revenue, estimates currently put the figure at £4m per month in the UK, indicating that while still in its infancy mobile gaming has begun to show a return.

Typical mobile gaming sessions are 20 minutes long and likely to be on a Saturday night in bed rather than while waiting for a bus

The two days were business-led and stood in contrast to both E3 and previous mobile shows with their lack of hype, instead concentrating on sharing information and growing the market. The focus on 3D and multiplayer technology seen at the GDC Mobile show, held in San Jose earlier in the year, was played down.

The US show was notable for Kayak Interactive's *Pub Pool* tournament. The game, from UK firm Iomo, was played across two different mobile network standards and handset technologies, something Kayak claims as a world first.

Next year's event is due to be held at Earl's Court on June 15-16.



The Kayak team go to work on the back-end that allows multiuser mobile games to be played across two different networks (CDMA and GSM) and handset technologies (Brew and J2ME). The *Pub Pool* tournament was linked to a big screen showing players' shots in realtime







Industry faces questions at EIGF

The Edinburgh International Games Festival assembles an expert panel, and this time you're asking the questions. Start sending in yours now

Ever wanted to pin down Microsoft on why its packaging draws blood rather than let you get at your brand-new Controller S? Want to put Gamestation on the spot about how the chain prices its secondhand games? Perhaps you want an explanation for why games are subject to age restrictions, or hear some informed opinions on how gaming can protect itself against increasingly moralistic legislation. Or take to task the providers of the *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* quiz games which have edged out arcade machines from their last few safe havens in British pubs.

This year, the EIGF is fielding a panel of international gaming industry experts, and has thrown the floor open to readers of **Edge**. Covering every aspect of the industry from hardware manufacture through game development to the retail environment, the panelists have a unique insight into how gaming got where it is and where it's likely to be going next.

The panellists' biographies shown here give some idea of the range of subjects you can ask them to tackle. The audience for the session will be made up of trade representatives, so it's only by sending your questions to them that you can ensure they hear a gamer's perspective as well as the concerns of their peers. Whether your questions are grandly sweeping or bitingly specific, deadly serious or frankly cheeky, this is your chance to have them answered.



You can submit your questions by writing to **Edge** at Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW, by visiting www.edge-online.com, or by emailing us at edge@futurenet.co.uk with 'Question Time' as the subject of your email. The most searching and intriguing questions will be put to the panel during a session at the festival on August 12, and you can read their answers in a special feature in issue 142.



Michel Cassius
Senior director
Xbox Platform and Marketing

Cassius's position gives him wide-ranging responsibility for all aspects of Xbox's performance in Europe. As head of the European marketing team, he oversees advertising, research, PR and packing for the console, as well as promoting the games published under the Microsoft Games Studio label. His leadership of the European Xbox Live team has seen Microsoft rise to dominate the online console gaming scene, successfully taming Europe's disjointed broadband network. Not just responsible for internal Microsoft policy, Cassius also manages relationships with thirdparty game developers.

Ian Baverstock
Business development director
Kuju

Kuju is one of Europe's largest game developers, and was formed when flight game veteran Simis was bought from Eidos Interactive. Baverstock jointly founded Simis in 1988, and has been closely involved ever since. Kuju, whose game roster includes *Lotus Challenge* and *Microsoft Train Simulator*, is developing *Advance Wars: Under Fire*, making it one of the few British developers working with Nintendo. Baverstock has overseen Kuju's development from a start-up, through the boom and bust of Britsoft, to it becoming a substantial company with studios in Brighton, Sheffield, London and Godalming.





Michael Logue
Managing director
Gamestation

Gamestation has grown from humble beginnings in a York side-street to become the fastest-growing game retailer in the UK. Logue joined the firm in 2002, and has since then overseen the company doubling in size. Now with over 100 stores nationwide, it has become the familiar alternative to the big-name chains. Following its purchase by Blockbuster, Gamestation can no longer act as spokesman for vulnerable independent game stores, but its loyalty to classics means that there's still some hope of being able to pick up a NES and a fistful of Mega Drive games on the high street.

Anna de Kerckhove
COO
Inspired Broadcast Networks

Broadcast Networks is the largest manager of coin-operated machines in the UK. With 90,000 machines in pubs, bookies and bingo halls, Inspired dominates what people see when they feed a pound coin into a waiting slot. Its multi-purpose 'itbox' terminal offers classic-style arcade titles as well as puzzle, parlour and quiz games, plus mobile phone downloads. Inspired is also the biggest supplier of virtual horse racing games. These live, truly randomised race simulations are broadcast into 10,000 licensed betting offices ten times a day, and almost certainly represent the most widely viewed computer-generated games in the world.





Doug Lowenstein
President
Entertainment Software Association

The ESA is the US trade body for the gaming industry. Members include most major publishers – EA, Activision, Microsoft, Konami, etc – and its remit includes a vigorous anti-piracy campaign. In recent years it has commissioned research into the effects of videogame violence on gamers, and has condemned lawsuits filed against the games accused of 'inspiring' real-world attacks. Its online Legislative Action Center encourages gamers to get involved in the legal issues which affect the games they play, such as IP protection and age restrictions, by contacting their members of Congress directly.

Flight sims spread wings

A successful launch for the European Flight Sim Show sees fans already looking forward to next year's event


The Virtual Air Traffic Simulation network had a strong presence at the event. For some odd reason, not many especially young people make up its number

A much-maligned sector of the gaming world, the weekend of June 19-20 was an opportunity for flight sim fans to come together and celebrate their passion. The inaugural European Flight Sim Show, held at Blackpool's Pleasure Beach, was a perfectly formed success with around 4,000 attendees. Exhibitors ranged from familiar names such as Microsoft, Logitech and Ubisoft to specialist vendors like Just Flight, Aerosoft and Captain Sim.

"You hope the first show will go well but this was an overwhelming success," said organiser **Mark Silcock**. "The exhibitors are happy and we've had people attending from all over the world – New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada and Russia." A DVD of the show, which also includes on-the-road reports from some of the most realistic home simulation setups, is available from www.fs2004nationalshow.com, and Silcock confirmed the show would return in a larger location in the summer of 2005.

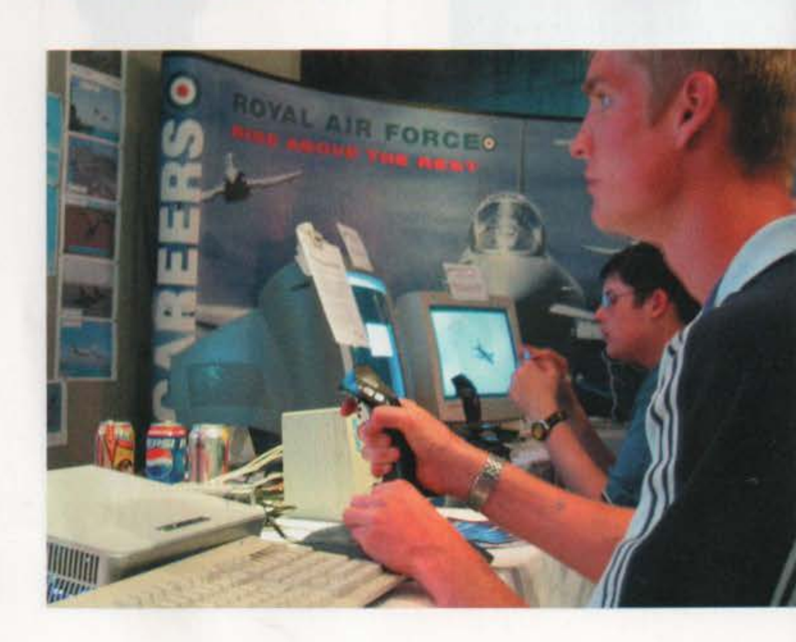
One of the highlights was the presence of Oleg Maddox, creator of the *IL-2 Sturmovik* combat series. With a reputation built on extreme attention to detail and excellent graphics, Maddox was showcasing the forthcoming *Pacific Fighters*. Based on the *IL-2* engine, it moves the action from the western front to the Pacific theatre. Featured aircraft range from favourites such as the Japanese Zero to the American Corsair, as well as UK, Dutch and Australian forces. Innovations include the ability to undertake carrier take-offs and landings as well as kamikaze missions. Maddox revealed some early artwork for his next game, too. This promises to be the most extensive recreation of the Battle of Britain to date, including Italian, Polish, Czech and French squadrons.


The latest innovative PC peripheral from Saitek is the X52 flight control system

The second major flight sim on show was, of course, Microsoft's stalwart *Flight Simulator FS2004*. Celebrating over 20 years since the first version was released, it remains the key product for commercial flight sim fans. It's also the basis for much of the flight sim industry, with smaller companies releasing compatible scenery, airport and aircraft model add-on packs. Typical of these is UK publisher Just Flight, which was showcasing its *Traffic 2004* package. This allows you to add background aircraft movements thanks to its artificial intelligence expansion. Among the top sellers are the VFR photographic scenery packs, which use data from the UK Millennium Map, while new aircraft additions include the Airbus A330 and A340 commercial airliners.

Away from products, the growing community of online flight sim gamers appeared in force. Perhaps the most impressive is the Virtual Air Traffic Simulation (VATSIM) network. With over 52,000 members worldwide and around 3,000 in the UK, it provides air traffic control for players flying online. A similar online-based take on reality is provided by the Royal Armed Forces Virtual – an organisation which reproduces the peacetime military activities of the RAF and Fleet Air Arm. Running a variety of squadrons ranging from fast jets to transports and even in-flight refuelling, it carries out military exercises using VATSIM to provide the necessary air traffic control.


As might be expected, there were plenty of companies at the show offering highly realistic replica cockpits. Mirroring the activity of the RAF, but online, the Royal Armed Forces Virtual is a 55-strong organisation of dedicated UK flight sim fans



Warhammer suffers online anticlimax

Legendary tabletop outfit Games Workshop and UK developer Climax announce the cancellation of MMO Warhammer Online

Two years after founding the joint venture company Warhammer Online, Climax and Games Workshop have announced their decision to cease development on their MMORPG based on the seminal tabletop RPG.

The game (right), which was picked up by Sega in 2003, has had a troubled history. First mooted as an online strategy game as early as 2000, Climax soon realised it would need partners to contribute toward the extensive back-end technology online games require. Initially partnered with Microsoft, by 2002 the game was being solely financed by Warhammer Online and had morphed into an MMO.

Over the last few months, Climax and Games Workshop had instigated a thorough review of *Warhammer Online*'s projected costs, and felt the onerous up-front costs of launching an MMO – including server, bandwidth and customer-support provision – would be much higher than estimated and could not be justified.

The project has not been entirely abandoned. Climax has made clear that work will continue on its Leviathan MMO engine (conceived, painfully enough, to combat 'extended development times, and consequently extended development budgets'). There is also the possibility of finding a new partner, preferably with MMO experience and existing infrastructure, which could reduce the costs and risk of bringing *Warhammer Online* to market.

It remains to be seen how realistic this hope will prove, since the MMO market is already crowded and big hitters like *EverQuest 2*, *Final Fantasy XI* and *World Of Warcraft* are on the horizon. The Nottingham studio at which the game has been based from the outset should not be threatened by the cancellation, as a second, unannounced game is already in development there.



The traditional requirements of game design, such as the graphical engine, now constitute a smaller and smaller part of the cost and challenge in launching and sustaining an MMO

Recently reviewed

A rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Full Spectrum Warrior	PC, Xbox	THQ	Pandemic	8
Thief: Deadly Shadows	PC, Xbox	Eidos	Ion Storm	7
Pikmin 2	GC	Nintendo	In-house	8
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	PS2	Capcom	Production Studio 2	7
Samurai Warriors	PS2	Koei	Omega Force	5
Way Of The Samurai 2	PS2	Capcom	Acquire	6
La Pucelle Tactics	PS2	Mastiff	Nippon Ichi	7
Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	PS2	SCEE	Sony Bend	3
Custom Robo Battle Revolution	GC	Nintendo	Noise	5
Van Helsing	PS2, Xbox	Vivendi Universal	Saffire	5
Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2	PS2	SCEE	Namco	6
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	GBA	Nintendo	Camelot	6



Full Spectrum Warrior



Thief: Deadly Shadows



Pikmin 2



Onimusha 3

CUTTINGS



All eyes east

After acknowledging its existence at this year's E3, Microsoft has debuted its Video Chat system, a camera that will give players the opportunity to see each other as they chat over Live. As well as novelty voice masking, users will be able use the system as a mirror to check their hair before they 'meet' their friends. It also comes equipped with the dubious ability to make other chatters' joypads rumble. Video Chat will initially launch in Japan, taking advantage of high levels of broadband subscription and hoping to attract a new demographic to Xbox who may have previously been alienated by its stylings and game library.

Nintendo is also rumoured to be developing its own EyeToy-style device, having trademarked the phrases 'Ningen-Copy/Manebito' and 'Manebito/Camera'. The associated logos show tiny cameras attached to the kanji, as well as a grimacing man waving his arms and a tiny box which could be a GameCube.

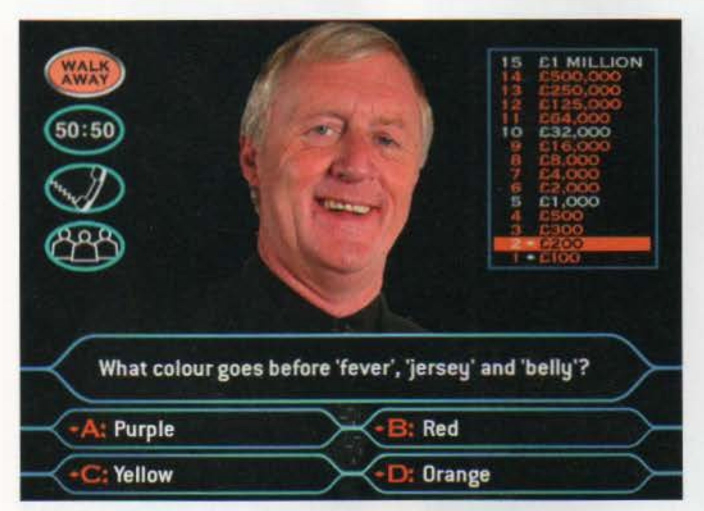
Not so Live Online

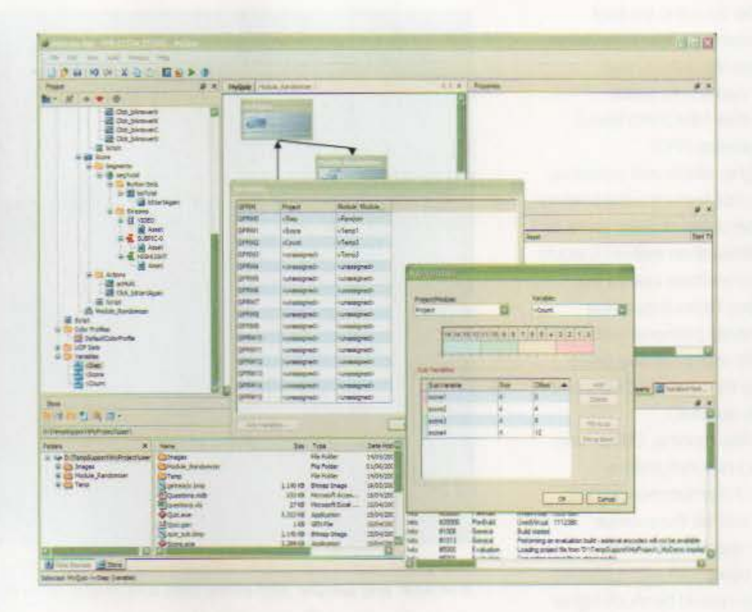
In a further piece of MMO woe, Microsoft has announced the cancellation of *True Fantasy Live Online*, the Level 5 RPG that was seen by many as the Xbox's great white hope for breaking the Japanese market. The company reportedly expressed concerns over the quality of the game as it stood, and over the difficulties of competing in the overcrowded MMORPG market. Level 5 continues work on the new *Dragon Quest* game, and on a third instalment of the *Dark Cloud* series.

www.zoo-tech.com

Making the most of DVD

ZOOtech's DVD-Extra Studio development environment is out to make the most of the interactivity contained in the humble DVD player





DVD-Extra provides a high-level development environment for the creation of DVD content ranging from interactive games to educational products and advertising covermounts as well as the traditional enhanced movie content

DVDEXTRASTUDIO



DVD-Extra Studio has modules for simple games such as hangman to demonstrate how the system works

A certain section of American society doesn't believe life offers second acts. In the 21st century videogame industry, however, there seems to be nothing but. One good example is Ian Stewart. Last seen taking a large cheque from Bruno Bonnell as his company, Gremlin, went the way of Infogrames back in 1999, the Sheffield-based entrepreneur has slowly been putting together a comeback. Part of his AIM-floated Zoo Digital Group handles standard game publishing, with the PC version of Midway's *The Suffering* a recent UK release. The other, separate part of the company, ZOOtech, is striking out down a more innovative path.

With the global installed base of DVD players around 200 million units and rising fast, the format is a truly massmarket piece of consumer electronics and according to ZOOtech's marketing manager, **Roland Spencer**, it's completely untapped in terms of interactive content.

"Linear entertainment, such as movies, only uses about five per cent of the technical specification of what's possible with DVD," he explains. Unlocking the remaining 95 per cent is the purpose of ZOOtech's DVD-Extra technology. The reason for such a bold boast is that DVD-Extra Studio offers a programming approach to a process that, up to this point, has been extremely laborious.

"Before DVD-Extra, content had to be hand-coded," explains product manager **Steve Porter**. "One of our example modules is a simple game of tic-tac-toe. To do this by hand, you'd have to create over 5,000 different static images to cover every game state. With DVD-Extra Studio, all you have to do is create templates for the board and menus, the two markers and then set out the game logic. The generation of the static screens, menus and finished executable is automatic."

It's this high-level functionality that sees ZOOtech touting its technology not as an authoring tool but as a full-blown development environment. And it's not just a matter of semantics. For, despite the patent-protected technology behind DVD-Extra, the most radical element is the business model. It costs €7,000 (£4,654) for an unlimited number of seats, each of which requires an annual maintenance fee of €1,395 (£928).

The rub, though, is the backend royalty rate. This ranges from five to 50 cents, depending on the interactive complexity of each disk pressed. In the same manner as the royalty console manufacturers such as Sony claim for each game released for their console, so ZOOtech is attempting to set itself up as being nothing less than a standard for the burgeoning interactive DVD market.

"The reason we're taking this approach is because DVD-Extra Studio enables content that just hasn't been possible before," Spencer argues. "And as far as we know, no one can offer any comparable software either."

With 60 studios already beta testing the product, the return of Ian Stewart to the headlines of UK game development might not be delayed for too much longer.

Phoney friend

The clearest demonstration of the power of DVD-Extra is the *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* DVD game. To date, three versions have been released, two in the UK and one in France, with total sales over 300,000. Yet, the technical challenge offered by the game was huge. Consisting of over 800 menus, 1,100 questions, 220,00 art assets and 56,000 navigation aids, there was no way it could have been accomplished by traditional DVD authoring methods. With DVD-Extra Studio, it took two people three months to complete. The *Millionaire* brand is also a good example of the type of game that is well suited to interactive DVDs. Not only can the discs hold a huge amount of rich content, but unlike the PC and console versions of the game, the DVD game relies on custom-recorded TV footage of Chris Tarrant with a live studio audience to provide a pre-canned version of the real TV show – and no dodgy CG models in sight. Questions are answered via static menus, which are navigated using a standard DVD remote. Other game features such as phone-a-friend are neatly included using an audio stream from a selectable panel of experts.

www.unrealtechnology.com

Epic reveals the future

Want to know what next generation games are going to look like? Just have a look at the Unreal 3 engine technology demo

Considering the flurry of speculation concerning the visual quality of the next wave of consoles, it's always sensible to look at what's happening the realm of PC graphics. Just as PlayStation's 3D capacities were mirrored by the rise of 3dfx's Voodoo cards, so PlayStation2's parallelism was matched by the multiple pipelines of DirectX 7-class hardware. The clearest indication of what to expect on HDTV screens circa 2006 comes courtesy of Epic's Unreal 3 engine.

Designed for both console and PC game development, the most interesting thing to note is Epic's focus on extreme visual quality. Typically, gaming hardware and engine technology have always been compared by brute characteristics such as framerate or the number of polygons or pixels that can be rendered per second, but the new paradigm is less concerned with number of pixels and more with their richness.

For example, in its baseline specification for Unreal 3 content, Epic suggests character meshes will range from around 3,000 to 12,000 polygons, which isn't much more than the 6,000+ polygon models being used by current games. What is impressive, however, is the assertion that these characters will be modelled with between 100 to 200 bones. This will enable much more sophisticated animation, including detailed facial and hand motion. Texturing is another area that will see a fillip, with standard texture map resolutions rising to 2,048x2,048 pixels, although the limited video memory of PlayStation3 in particular is likely to halve this. Depending on the exact mix of resolutions developers chose to employ, Epic predicts between five and 20 such characters could be onscreen at any time. Typical gaming environments will contain between 1,000 and 5,000 renderable objects; when combined with onscreen characters, this could result in anything between 200,000 to 1.2m polygons being visible per scene.

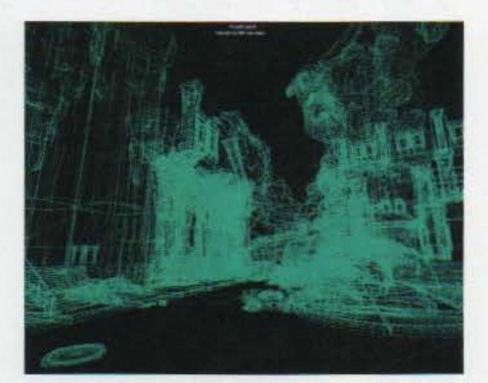
The other key enabler for such visual quality is lighting. Dynamic shadows is one of the big focuses in game graphics, particularly with respect to generating soft, fuzzy shadows. Unreal 3 addresses this issue using 16x-oversampled buffers, something typically used to solve aliasing problems. Other available techniques supported by the engine include per-pixel lighting, a modular realtime shader system and volumetric environmental effects such as physically accurate distance fog. It all adds up to an extremely powerful armoury of lighting features. But, despite the fact there is no hardcoded limit on the number of lights in Unreal 3, Epic recommends between only two and five large radius lights per scene. This is because dynamic lighting remains extremely processor intensive, and for this reason getting top performance out of 2006's hardware will be a skilled task of mixing tightly focused spotlights with more general lights to create the required atmosphere. When it comes to game graphics, the next generation is never enough.



Realtime soft shadows are one area of game graphics all developers are working hard to feature in their next-generation games







Epic is using offline art processing to enable it to compress hugely detailed scenery into a form that can be successfully run in a realtime game engine





Volumetric environmental effects supported include height fog and physically accurate distance fog. A mixture of per-pixel lighting and pre-computed bump-granularity self-shadowing maps generate the highly complex surface effects in the Unreal 3 engine



There are no hardcoded limits to the number of dynamic lights with Unreal 3, but performance issues mean it's unlikely there'll ever be more than five per scene

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE





Barbie plays *Pac-Man*. A hitherto unknown accessory, it gives her something to do when the kids get bored of her



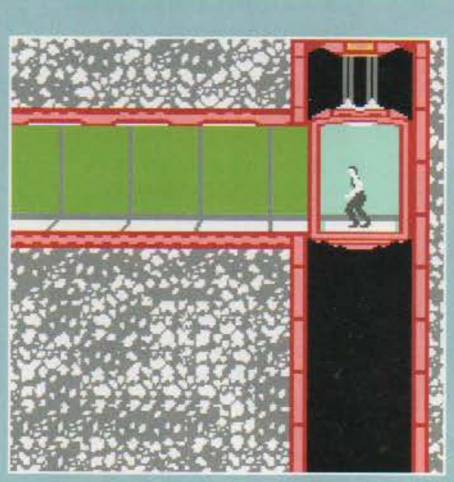




We were going to print this actual size, but the thought of readers mutilating the mag convinced us otherwise



The new Commodore website, where you can buy legal C64 ROMs such as *Impossible Mission* (right)



01 Paper Mario

UK: Out There obsessives will remember a featured weblink some issues ago which encouraged readers to produce paper models of their favourite videogame characters. Indeed, our self-made model of bunny Mario remains fixed to a monitor to this day, a blended product of new-school videogaming and old-school craftsmanship. Even cuter, though, are Way Of The Rodent's paper arcade machines, miniature versions of classic cabinets for you to cut out and keep. The site – a mix of passionate modern gaming critique and retro-coloured reminiscence, sort of like Jeff Minter in HTML form – offers dolls-house-sized copies of *Tempest*, *Defender*, *Robotron* and more. Perfect for a rainy day, although it has the unfortunate side effect of making you crave the real cabinets – and they're a little more expensive than a sheet of A4. Have a go anyway at www.wayoftherodent.com

02 Return of a long-lost friend

Holland: Hold the front page: Commodore is back. Now owned by Dutch company Tulip, the firm recently launched a C64 TV game of the type that's so vogue in gadget shops nowadays. But that's not all. Go to www.commodoreworld.com and, after some intelligent clicking around, you'll find yourself at a webshop where you can purchase C64 games. OK, so it's just the ROM – no artistic packaging, no misleading arcade-captured screenshots on the back – but it's something, and with *Paradroid*, *Impossible Mission* and *Uridium* on offer, those of you who've downloaded the games from less salubrious sites have finally got a chance to clean your consciences. Well, a little, at least.

Soundbytes

"It was extraordinary to watch how quickly and how cleverly gamers were able to unravel what are traditionally unsolvable problems for law enforcement related to this kind of cyber crime"
Valve's Gabe Newell comments on the arrest of people suspected of involvement in the theft of the *Half-Life 2* source code

"There is no Game Boy version of *Halo* planned, and none in production. It's very unlikely that such a version would ever happen for all the obvious reasons, and the less obvious reasons, that the ColecoVision talks fell apart and The Bandai Pippin version is taking up all our development bandwidth"
A message from Bungie on its official website, responding to rumours that a GBA version of *Halo* is in the works

"Without beating around the bush, getting straight to the point, *Mashed* in the opinion of a number of the leading magazines is perceived to be one of the best games of its kind to appear for a long while. With its simple premise it has a lot to live up to. [We were] eager to face the challenge and experience possibly the ultimate adrenaline rush!"
An online review of *Mashed* gets straight to the point

03 Finally, a reason to buy five Cubes

US: *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* is undoubtedly an interesting and innovative experience, but it's also one that demands serious hardware investment for maximum enjoyment. Frustrated by the game's insistence on a GBA for every participating player, one fearless adventurer vowed to circumvent Square's stringent requirements. And circumvent he did, using five televisions, five GameCubes, four GameBoy Players and four Wavebirds for a comfortable – if slightly convoluted – fourplayer experience. Apparently it works out cheaper, too, providing you've got people willing to loan you some of the hardware. "The only thing you need is that one extra GameCube," explains the innovator on his site (at www.arxmage.net/ffcc.htm). "I guess I've found that where four players can be found, an extra GC can always be found." Almost philosophical, that.

04 QD undermined by drill

UK: Nokia's QD fixes many of the problems users had with the N-Gage, not least the ridiculous 'sidetalking' aspect that caused so much hilarity on the device's launch last year. The arrival of the QD might not be of comfort to non-affluent N-Gage owners, though, since phones don't grow on trees, but must be purchased with money or promises. www.allaboutngage.com thinks it has a solution, though: its 'rear talkin' mod lets players look fractionally less stupid by talking into the back of their phone rather than the edge. It requires some delicate drilling, and will certainly void your warranty as well as possibly exposing you to all of the kind of space rays that phones thrive on, but some might consider that a price worth paying for the chance to make normal phone calls. Check the site for exact details, and be prepared to go back to good old landlines if it all goes wrong.

05 A poke and a hack

US: We're all for progressive emulation and the communist-style expropriation of branded technology for other purposes, but we can't help but feel that Team Pokéme's time might have been better spent hacking away at something a little more useful than the Pokémon Mini. Still, it's not like their work's been in vain – the videogame community can now freely develop for the system, and there are already a handful of projects underway, including *PokéSonic*, *PokéOutRun* and our favourite, *P-Type*. A side effect is that there's now an emulator for those who wish to run the homebrew games on their GameCube, although that does seem a little too wilfully perverse, even for us. Still, each to their own – more details at darkfader.net/pm/

Data Stream E-tail

For the first time, **women** have outspent **men** on the internet, racking up **£495** a year on average compared with **£470** for men

Women spend the most on **clothes** and **footwear**, while **men** fritter away their cash on **music** and **electrical goods**

The largest group of online shoppers is the **over 55s**, whose spending averages **£527** a year

E-tail is growing at **ten times** the rate of traditional shopping, and the market is currently worth **£4.9bn**

Sources: Clerical Medical, Verdict, Office Of National Statistics

03





It may seem a lot of trouble to go to, but for the ultimate *FF:CC* experience, you'd be hard pressed to beat this

04



Release a mobile phone that makes the user look like a lemon, and this is what happens. Remember these?







The rear talkin' mod in all its diminutive glory. Soon, you too may never fear accepting that call in a public place

05



OutRun on Pokémon Mini? Yes indeed. Sit yourself in a vibrating chair for an arcade-style experience. Sort of



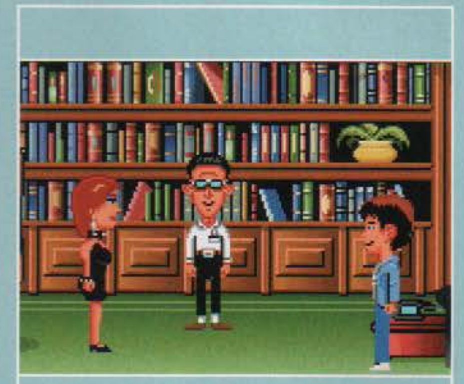


The PlayStation component doesn't work yet, but Robert vows to continue his experiments until it does

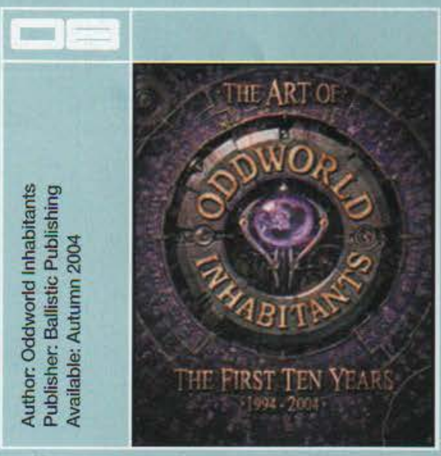




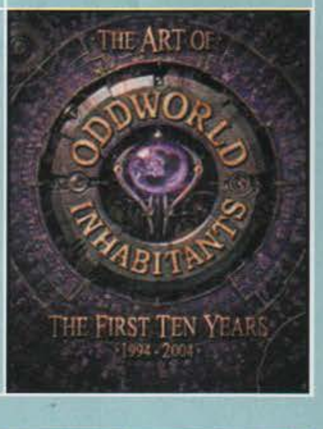
LucasFan Games may consider LucasArts to be dead, but *Maniac Mansion* is very much alive on the web



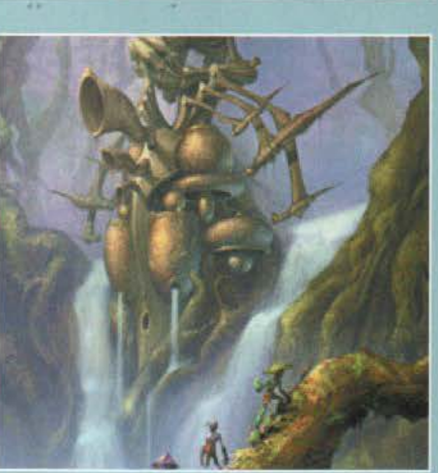
Now do *Day Of The Tentacle*. With groovy pixel shaders. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Pleeeeeease...

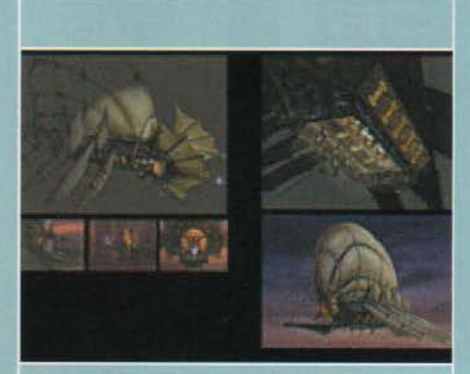


Author: Oddworld Inhabitants
Publisher: Ballistic Publishing
Available: Autumn 2004









Get in quick enough and you could get a limited-edition numbered, leather-bound edition of the book. Very nice

06 Presenting... the Woodcube

Scandinavia: Six bits of wood, three console innards, some screws, one power lead and one video lead. Oh, and glue. Lots of glue. That's what it took to produce Robert Edström's Woodcube. A curious and unnatural amalgam of SNES, N64 and PlayStation, fused together in GM Frankenstein harmony. See more at: w1.346.telia.com/~u34604620/woodcube/pictures.html

07 Maniac reminder

Germany: The title page on LucasFan Games' website lists LucasArts' dates. '1982-2004', it reads. 'In remembrance'. While rumours of the death of the adventure game have been somewhat overstated, there are few who'll argue that LucasArts has descended from master of the art to peddler of anything Star Wars. LucasFan Games aim is to preserve the company's reputation. The team's first game was *The New Adventures Of Zak McKracken*, but it's their second that has attracted our attention. A remake of *Maniac Mansion* (smartly titled *Maniac Mansion Deluxe*), it's a full-colour, carefully sculpted clone of the original that's been downloaded more than 200,000 times at the time of writing, and received acclaim from the likes of Ron Gilbert. "You guys did an amazing job," said the *Monkey Island* creator. "My hat is off to you." Our hat too, Ron. Download the game from www25.brinkster.com/lucasfangames/

08 Something for the coffee table

US: Lorne Lanning's Oddworld's an odd world, for sure; while the games themselves aren't much more than modern manifestations of 8bit platformers, the organic visuals that cloak the levels and ladders transform Oddworld into something dark and delightful. The Art of Oddworld Inhabitants: The First Ten Years gives readers a glimpse into the processes behind Oddworld's creation, while the attached press release gives a glimpse of its founding father's passion and verbosity. "[The Art of Oddworld Inhabitants] reveals the visual fuel that hung on our walls and continually inspired us as we stumbled our way through the trials and tribulations that litter the hazardous crossroads where creative artistry and free enterprise collide," says an emotional Lanning of the work. Filled with design sketches, colour roughs, storyboards and screens, the book debuts in the autumn.

Continue

Trackmania
But please, stop the self-harm and make a console version

Ice-T
Rumoured to be a player in *GTA: San Andreas*. Word, and so on

Euro 2004
It almost made us want to get some fresh air. Almost

Quit

Game presentations at launch parties
Marvel at the struggle to explain *Driver 3*'s control system to drunks

The sandwich man
Retiring. Now we actually have to leave the office for sustenance

Euro 2004
All over for another four years



09 The Game Makers

Like a naughty schoolboy, the videogame industry seems to revel in its immaturity, even to the point of exploitation. It's an attitude thrown into sharp relief by The Game Makers, a history of boardgame manufacturer Parker Bros, which released its first game in 1883. Called Banking, the card game was invented by George Parker, the singleminded dynamo who established and ran the company until the 1930s. Mixing stern business acumen with a steely focus on the quality of games, with brothers Edward and Charles he built Parker Bros into the largest game company in the US.

Early successes included Pit!, as well as more short-lived fads such as Mah Jong. However, it was Monopoly that provided the firm's key moneyspinner. Initially rejected, George Parker bought the rights from its inventor in 1934, while protecting his investment by buying up similar games and taking out copyrights and a patent. Parker Bros literally had a monopoly on Monopoly. And despite the ravages of the great depression, the company ran its factories 24/7 for over a year in order to meet demand.

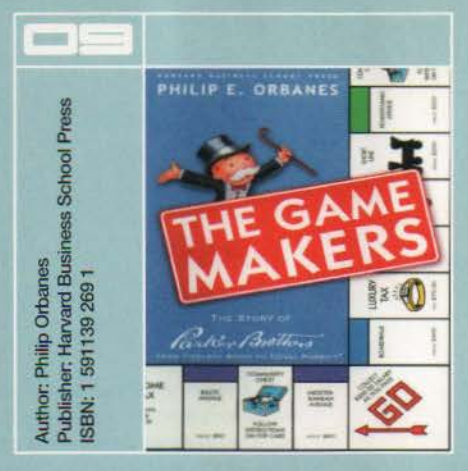
But as the industry moved from a manufacturing to a marketing-led enterprise after the second world war, so the company's emphasis changed. In a lesson noteworthy for every videogamespublisher, Parker Bros ended up as a battleground for corporate egos, as well as suffering from the boom-bust excesses of a dalliance with emerging markets such as videogames. It lost its focus on the quality of core product, finally ending up a division of Hasbro.

10 Motion Blur

In true coffee table style, onedotzero's collection of the 28 visual artists it considers cutting edge is a weighty mass of paper, complete with a DVD, all smartly packaged within a high-density foam slipcase. The smoothness continues inside with a full range of production sketches, screenshots and interviews with the likes of Shynola, Hexstatic, Sweden, Tim Hope and the Light Surgeons – all in neat alphabetised order. And Motion Blur certainly provides a good overview of what's going on in the world of graphic moving imagemakers.

But, between such gloss and the often overwhelming neo-techno-manga styled robots, something seems to be missing. It's best summed up by featured artist **Johnny Hardstaff**, whose Future of Gaming project for the PlayStation was pulled because of its perceived negativity. But as Hardstaff himself comments: "I'd rather turn tricks for sailors than toe the party line when something as bland as marketing is involved." And it's a lack of such spikiness within many of the spotlessly turned-out sequences of music videos, stings and commercials that is the book's most surprising aspect. After all, this is the art from and of a demographic supposedly treading the fine line between rampant consumerism and militant anti-globalisation. Another interesting omission is the work of female artists, who are almost invisible. Presumably, this shouldn't be seen as a failing on the part of onedotzero; Motion Blur is a compilation from the available resources, after all. Nevertheless, it blunts what on many levels is otherwise a beautiful book.

09



Author: Philip Orbanes
Publisher: Harvard Business School Press
ISBN: 1 591139 269 1

10



Author: onedotzero
Publisher: Laurence King
ISBN: 1 85669 323 6

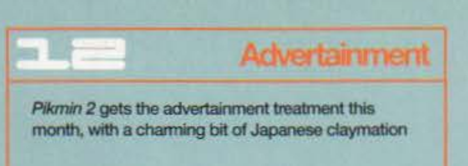
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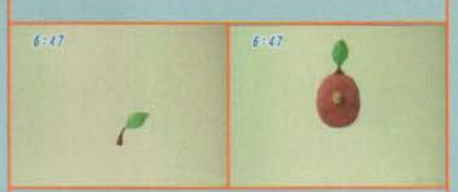
Site: **The greatest internet sports games of all time**
URL: **sport.guardian.co.uk/thegear/story/0,12490,1073461,00.html**

11 Internet sports

Reading Guardian Unlimited is one of our favourite ways of wasting the day, second only to playing low-maintenance (mostly sport-related) web-based games. So the site's recently produced rundown of all the best low-maintenance (mostly sport-related) web-based games is quite convenient. Each has a P45 rating – we love the five-star rated *Blast Billiards*, but also have plenty of office time for *Rong*, designed by a lead programmer at Gearbox. Enjoy, but don't blame us when you're fired.



Pikmin 2 gets the advertainment treatment this month, with a charming bit of Japanese claymation



From little acorns... big tellies grow. A child's song accompanies the development of a plasticine TV



Once the telly's fully grown, the Pikmin appear on its screen. The red one first, surrounded by flames



Then it's blue's go, with an ocean to swim, while the yellow fellow seems to be enjoying a trampoline



Purple is strong, and proves it, while the nasty albino white one has a bottle of poison to scare you with



So, we have our rainbow of Pikmin, let's have some in-game action... The ship comes in for a landing




Louie gets his first look at a Pikmin, and his eyes bulge so much he looks as if he may pop. Nasty




More beasties, all beaten by Pikmin. And if that doesn't persuade you to buy *Pikmin 2*, nothing will

For a while, all is calm in the chaos, like pressing pause, like bullet time. For a while, though the drunkards snarl and puke around him, it is just RedEye and the train and his fuzzy, circular, vodka-sprained thoughts. A zen-like focus, perhaps, or the eye of the storm? More like the belly of the beast, an ancient metal spark-belching dragon, stomach thick with indigestion. Best to keep your head down. Don't draw attention, don't make too much noise. Just get to where you're going.

And his thoughts are going nowhere, exactly nowhere; that's how it should be right now, he thinks, synapses smashing atoms and batting them around for sport. But Ideas – capital I – fall from heaven like starlit meteors, and when they strike you on the back of the head you'd better be ready to take notice. That's why RedEye carries a pen and paper all the time, and that's why he's scrabbling through his bag now, why his pen is to the paper, scribbling furiously.

The train carriage lurches to one side, and RedEye's marker slips in his hand, scarring an ugly black line across the spiral-bound notepad. But he's writing now, and nothing can stop that: the hop, skip and loop of his handwriting barely breaks stride, just continues the word across the other side of the pad. The word becomes a sentence, the sentence a paragraph. The paragraph is this one.

So: tonight RedEye remembers – no, watches, because there's a difference between memory and fiction – what it's like to grow up. He watches friends who used to skip around Ghost Valley with balletic skill worthy of the electronic Bolshoi, watches them move their consoles from beneath their TV sets and then into the loft, move from games to cryptic crosswords and DIY. His eyes flicker and he sees friends who were the first to have their asses kicked at *Virtua Fighter* capitulate to nappies. He watches people grow up and drift off into the sunset, wander off into the *Silent Hill* haze and disappear.

He gets Christmas cards from them sometimes, perfunctory messages of goodwill once a year. 'Dear You, I'm great, the kids are older, the new car's shinier, the wife's on gin and Botox, compliments of the season, 'til next year, Me.' The Christmas card list is how people keep score, isn't it? Best wishes by reciprocation tallying up in the hallway. Count them up when you die. Congratulations! You have placed in the Top Ten! Please enter your three-letter tag, which will be recorded in heaven in perpetuity, or at least until God switches off the power.

It's bullshit, of course. What matters? Art and beauty, leaving your mark on the planet. Happiness. Creating something worthwhile. RedEye watches people grow up and it looks like it sucks, because that's when you start counting the Christmas cards. Listen: 30 minutes ago he was at a party, surrounded by some of them, friends who used to play games but now don't, and no longer think they're much more than diversions for kids, and OMG OMG how far is that from the philosophy they cut their wrists for five years before? They ask what's worth playing at the moment, out of politeness, and RedEye can't answer. He doesn't have an answer. He's not sure there is one.

Sorry, this is incoherent. Drunk. Train. People singing. Momentum carries a can of cider up the aisle. The point is tonight RedEye questioned whether he ought to be growing up himself, and couldn't answer that, either. Because recently, he has been forced to concede that his lifelong battle to have videogames recognised as a worthwhile hobby may be over. That defeat may be inevitable. Let's try out the new philosophy: stop drawing parallels between videogames and films today, but not for all the reasons RedEye has mentioned in the past. No, we are not film. We are anime, we are comics and we are the bloody juggling club. We are a niche medium with the capacity to astound, marginalised by our own decree and set in a vacuum for eternity.

Oh, your teenage children will love videogames, and so will theirs, and so will theirs. And the industry will continue to make grand, meaningless statements about revenue and size: we are bigger than film, bigger than music, bigger than God. We are not. Maybe financially, but that only counts to the zombies in charge, the ones with Christmas cards racked up on an abacus. In terms of things that actually matter? Even that precious capacity to astound is rarely exploited, and that's why people get bored, why they grow up and move on, and why most people never even experience their wonder. Because they try one, it's the same as all the others, and they never try one again. Short-termist policies have brought long-term death.

And though we have spurts of media interest, they are merely spots of blood dripping from a long-cold corpse, spatters of superficial interest that congeal and fade into the multimedia carpet as soon as they've been spilt. This magazine can be as prissy and grand as it wants about *Rez* and *Ico*, but anyone serious about touching entertainment's precious, posed, creative ice face will turn their heads and realise we are mostly barren. Tales of synesthaesia may obfuscate the press, but anyone who actually plays the game will see it as a prettier *Space Invaders*. *Ico*'s fairytale literacy is only intelligent, acute, so cute, when juxtaposed with *Jak & Daxter*. Put it next to The Neverending Story and it's already kids' stuff.

RedEye's pen moves furiously, marking three or four leaves deep: TOYS, TOYS, TOYS. He crosses that out, ripping the top sheet. WE COULD HAVE HAD THE WORLD, he writes. BUT WE WERE CONTENT WITH THE PLAYGROUNDS. He looks around the train. The belly has settled, the alcoholics become the comatose. No art or beauty, nothing of worth. Lots of grown-ups behaving like kids. He throws the pad in his bag and stares out the window at a beautiful landscape no one can see.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Content with the playgrounds

We are not film. We are anime, we are comics and we are the bloody juggling club. We are a niche medium with the capacity to astound

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Structure is a critical component of all art. Whether it be uses of the golden ratio in painting, the sonata form in music, or the three-act architecture advised by theorists of contemporary screenwriting, the shape of a work is not just a wrapper for the content, it is what allows the content to have meaning. Even those aspects of modernist art that sought to abandon traditional structures most often smuggled in new ones in their places: T S Eliot's poem The Waste Land looked like it was in randomly cut-up free verse, but was very tightly organised. Free-jazz musicians instinctively impose structure on the fly: the bass player noodles around on his own for a while, now let's all honk our heads off for a climax.

Visual art, even a Jackson Pollock drip painting, cannot help but imply structures. In the other, temporal arts, the most apparently formless work will still generally have a discernable beginning, middle and end. The need for this kind of shape (though it need not imply a traditional storytelling mode) seems hardwired into us. This makes videogames as they currently stand all the more peculiar. Most players will not see the ending of a large number of games, and the beginnings are on the whole amazingly shoddy. If this is true, they fail structurally as entertainment experiences.

The literary critic Frank Kermode once wrote a book called The Sense Of An Ending. Just as important is the sense of a beginning. Novels are celebrated for their famous first lines: Iain Banks' 'It was the day my grandmother exploded' in The Crow Road; or Jane Austen's 'It is a truth universally acknowledged…' in Pride And Prejudice. Music, too, trades on first impressions: the first few notes of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 2, or Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, or Nirvana's Smells Like Teen Spirit, are thrilling calls to action. Great movies, too, begin well: Trinity's run in The Matrix, the sex scene in Betty Blue or countless pre-credits extravaganzas in Bond films.

And then we turn to videogames and what do we find? I am not going to allow in evidence any scene-setting FMV, I want to know how the *game* begins, what happens when you start playing it. Most often, these days, it is a kind of training mission. *Thief: Deadly Shadows* or *Galleon* both prod you along a highly linear scenario in which on-screen instructions and tests teach you which button does what. These instructions are completely disconnected from the gameworld fiction. As I was following the old guy and his daughter up to their house in *Galleon*, for example, I somehow contrived to fall off the cliff, nearly kill myself and sprint back up to join them only to discover they expressed no concern at my behaviour. It seems bizarre that games which work so hard to establish an atmospheric scenario are so willing to compromise from the outset.

By contrast, the brilliant beginning of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, with Snake crouching in the rain on the deck of the tanker, leverages Kojima's well-known postmodern lucidity by allowing in-game characters to refer to button-pressing, and so it teaches you the basics within the fiction. *Halo*, too, makes a welcome gesture towards this kind of solution when the decision of inverting the Y-axis is contextualised as the fiction of fine-tuning your Master Chief suit aboard ship.

What is notable about these counter-examples is that they are not just training missions, but the genuine initial stages of the games, in which the flow of newbie information gradually fades so that you find yourself already playing the game for real. Contrarily, *Deus Ex: Invisible War* suffers from an excruciatingly boring first level, packed full of expository dialogue and player shepherding. Overall, training levels – whether self-contained as in *Deadly Shadows* or not – are likely to smudge the impact of a game's beginning in critical ways. You are not really playing the game yet, but nor are you just practicing. You are between worlds, half-immersed in a clunky no man's land.

The worst example of a training mission ever conceived has to be the teeth-gnashing initial driving test in *Driver*, a superb way of punishing anyone who had just given the developer their money. Who knows how many people never got out of the garage? That is an extreme example of another fact about videogame beginnings: the curious situation appears to be that most videogames are least fun to play right at the start.

This is a structural problem common to many games that rely on power-ups, skill increases and so on to provide a sense of progression. If you are too weak and unequipped at the beginning, the promise of future enjoyment may not be enough to hold a gamer's attention. Many, it seems, gave up on *Manhunt* before it becomes really interesting, when guns appear. I can't blame them: it's the game's fault for taking too long to reveal its genius.

Nor can I find it in myself to censure the FHM reviewer who, famously, gave *Ninja Gaiden* one star out of five because he never got past the first boss. It took me more times than I care to admit, too. Farcically, the game actually gets easier after that. The stupidly difficult first level is like a big Keep Out sign to the mass market. Games like *Ninja Gaiden* and *Manhunt* appear to rely cynically on the poor consumer's desperation to get value for money out of a game that she is not enjoying at the start. Rather than revelling in a great beginning, as we should be able to, we are trying to make the tedium of the beginning a distant memory once we arrive at the heart of the game.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

On beginnings

Most players will not see the end of a large number of games, and the beginnings are on the whole amazingly shoddy. If this is true, they fail

Around 2,000 years ago, the poet Horace gave some advice to storytellers: begin 'in medias res'. Throw your reader into the heart of the action without wasting time. It is no accident great games such as *MGS2* or *Half-Life* do just that. Others, while still explaining controls, at least plunge you into adrenalised situations from the word go, as in *The Return Of The King* where you, as Gandalf, are immediately fighting for Helm's Deep; or *Forbidden Siren*, where you are fleeing a disgusting zombie policeman. We should settle for nothing less. We do not owe games our attention – they should earn it. If a game does not begin well, we will be less inclined than ever to see if it ends well.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

Did you know that I was supposed to announce a new game at E3? "Which game is he talking about?" you're asking. Well, the fact is it was not actually presented during the show. It should have been, but it was not. Yeah, I hear what you're saying: "Pffff! You missed the deadline. You were just too late." Well, not at all. I have to confess that I did take the disc to the show floor, but I did not use it… Why? Why did I do such a thing? OK, here is the story. I'll do like a report of the events. But first I need to explain a few things so my reasons will seem clear to you.

When you are showing a completely new game, you pay a lot of attention to many details when you present it for the very first time at a show or to a magazine. Until this point, you would simply stress the game's innovations or fun features. Well, this has been the case for many years and it's also a fundamental point in game marketing. Nowadays, games appear involving stories or licences. There are more and more of these games and you need to make a lot of preparation to communicate these points. You need to pay the necessary attention to every detail in your presentation. You need to have the game content's message, meaning and theme perfectly understood by your audience.

By the way, why is that?

Well, as I said, the game I was supposed to announce at E3 was something big, a major project for me. I was very anxious to know if people at the show would correctly understand its content, theme or message. Obviously, I can't speak about it in detail, but it is based on what I would qualify as a 'dangerous' content or idea, something I think has not been developed in a game before. You are getting curious about it, right? I'm aiming at a wider, international audience here. This is one of the challenges I set myself. Well, it is quite a delicate situation and I was trying to figure out if people will get my game right. I don't mean about the gameplay but its subject, about the idea it is trying to deliver. So I was very anxious not to make any mistakes for the game's debut.

Anyway, under these circumstances it was decided that my game would be announced at E3. So we had to make the necessary preparations, contacting our US and European offices and giving them the full details. So, the day before the announcement was due to be made, I had a last meeting with our overseas subsidiaries staff.

So I began my presentation to these people using the demonstration video which was supposed to be used for the announcement during the show. After the projection of the video, events followed an unforseen course. Their reactions went in a completely different direction to what I had expected. The marketing people started to stress one aspect of my game's message in a way that was not the same as its original meaning.

Moreover, during the sales pitch, differences appeared in the key words they wanted to be used. The sales and marketing people had very different approaches and a different take on my idea.

Of course, we could not agree with each other on how to have my project announced and ultimately understood by users. I tried to speak with both sides in order to see their respective points and try to find a common ground, but things ended in arguments. In such a situation, you always have someone trying to cool things down – you know, listening to everybody's opinion and trying to fill in the gaps in order to get a compromise. But in this process you always have one side that gets its points taken into consideration while the other will be asked to lose some ground.

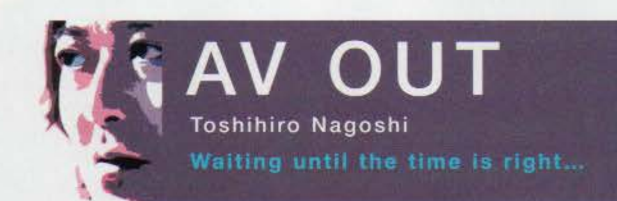
This time, I decided not to do such a thing and ignored their arguments. I had this thought: if they don't respect or get my views, I don't see how players will be able to get it right with my game. This would be very problematic for me, and for the game, of course. I don't want to force my way, have people accepting my views without understanding them in the first place. What good would that do? I would like these people to understand my message correctly first, but at the present moment I don't have much time to do that, and I prefer not to make a hazardous presentation of the game. It would be too risky, and this project is too important for me. Maybe we need to cancel this initial announcement at E3 and then, only after having the game perfectly understood, why not have it announced later in another place?

With this alternative in mind, it has been decided not to announce my game yet, so it wasn't at E3. This has been my decision, my own. I know E3 was the perfect chance to announce my game, and I missed it. Of course, there were people who thought: 'What the hell is he doing?' And, yes, I suppose I could have reached a compromise and then made the announcement as scheduled, as missing E3 is missing the biggest videogame show of all, it's the perfect place where all the media and the industry are gathered. But I don't regret my decision at all. It would have been a regrettable mistake from me to announce the game there. The right thing to do is to develop the message correctly and have it perfectly understood by the people who will eventually sell it. This way, it will be properly understood by users, the people I ultimately want to communicate the message to. And so that's what I have done.

I really believe this is the right process to deliver my important project, so I would like to apologise to the people who were waiting for my game. I'm feeling very sorry for them, but I'm now pretty sure it has been a great experience for me and it will help me make the right announcement at the right time for the game. It should not take that much time!

See you!





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi

Waiting until the time is right…

If the marketing people don't respect or get my views, I don't see how players will be able to get it right with my game. This is problematic

Toshihiro Nagoshi is general manager of Sega's Creative Center division. His games include the Super Monkey Ball *series and* Daytona USA

What's the big idea? No, I'm not being flippant; it's just something I tend to ask myself when weighing up my purchasing options. Go on, fatty – go through your games collection and take out every game. Now count how many you can distil into a simple, concise – and unique – high-concept idea ('it has zombies in it' doesn't count). You know, an idea you haven't seen in any other game. You can't do it, can you? You can't do it because your games library is stuffed with football games, games with zombies in and identikit roleplaying games featuring young manga men with spiky hair and big swords.

How did that happen, eh? Wasn't there a time when every game was different to the last in more than just the title (Christ, even the very names are much of a muchness these days… y'know… *Medal Of Honor* or *Men Of Valor* or *Call Of Duty*? *Morrowind* or *Neverwinter* or Neverwind? Admittedly, the latter is the name of my preferred brand of suppository, but you wouldn't know it).

There are precious few videogames in this shiny and bleeping modern age which could be pegged as 'high concept'. Yet there was indeed a time, not so long ago, when every game revolved around a single, neat idea. *Pac-Man* was pretty much one idea. *Space Invaders* was one idea. *Gauntlet*, *Dig Dug*, *Donkey Kong*, *Pong*, *Tempest*, *Marble Madness*, *Tetris*… all games pivoting around a single, unique notion. Now don't be thinking this is some sort of godawful nostalgia tug-a-thon; some of those games were awful. Plus, there are a few titles around today which can boast the same qualities of uniqueness.

Super Monkey Ball is the obvious contender, and Sony's current knack for accessory-based games – *SingStar* and EyeToy – also bodes well. But after that? The quest for The Big Idea has been replaced by an all-encompassing, blipvert feeding frenzy wherein game creators demand we be pumped with new idea after new idea before they've been given a chance to breathe. Never mind the quality; feel the width of our genres, love.

Compare any of the above with, say, the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, *Jak III*, or *Final Fantasy XIVIIIX* and it's like comparing a fork with a complex system of pulleys, gears and tiny motors, which delivers every mouthful of food in a new and needlessly complicated fashion. The name of this device? Cutlery Of Dignity. Is something really better just because it does things the long way round and you have to read the instruction manual first? Bloody *Elite* has a lot to answer for.

The simple route is the most direct – sometimes not as picturesque – but it lessens the chance that you're going to get lost, be buggered by a tramp or, in the case of our lovely games industry, limit your audience.

It's a terrible old cliché, but the phrase 'pick up and play' has never been more important. As new blood comes to gaming – as we're always being told it is – then it's going to come from outside the usual gamer geek pool. More importantly still, the average age of gamers is going up all the time – and that's because we're not dropping the hobby as we get older. I dunno about you, but once I'd have gladly spent a week reading the manual for an Amiga flight sim – and that was just the section on how to load it up. Now I need to sandwich that in between filing sodding VAT receipts, doing 'work', beating my children and dancing naked for the perverse gratification of my mortgage advisor.



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Something old, something new

I'm just saying there needs to be more choice now, and amid those choices it would be lovely to see a return to a purer form of gaming

That aside, why is it that the generation above yours is still more at home with *Pac-Man* or *Space Invaders* than *Onimusha 2* or *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*? Could it be because the gameplay – the wondrously manual-obsolescing gameplay – isn't a big, baffling chore? That it's easy to 'get'? The sorry fact is the average person in the game shop won't enjoy being confronted by everything-but-the-kitchen-sink gameplay.

I'm just saying there needs to be more choice now, and amid those choices it would be lovely to see a return to a purer form of gaming. A form where the developer came up with an idea – just ONE idea – and then set about exploiting it in as many ways as possible over the course of a full-length game. And when I say ONE idea I don't mean 'football' or 'driving', or 'shooting things'. Games have to get simpler. Or, rather, there have to be more simple games. And I'm not sure jabbing a stylus at the screen of a handheld console is the way to go.

Football games sell well because people don't need to think to understand them; they do what it says on the tin. Licensed games sell well because, again, there's a familiarity. A game with an attached licence is a comfort blanket for the casual gamer, shorthand that says they're automatically going to understand at least some elements in the game. But again, what about original ideas? There was never another game like *Pac-Man* (well, all right, there was *3D Haunted Hedges* on the Spectrum… and *Ms Pac-Man* et al), but the saddest thing of all is that this move from the high-concept to the no-concept sees the gaming landscape turning into one huge, amorphous grey mass. Nowadays, most games are Frankenstein's monsters, stitched together from parts dug up from the local bone yard, with nary a fresh and original body part.

Max Payne gave birth to the notion of bullet time (in game terms, at least). *Billy Hatcher* had the egg rolling – albeit nowhere near as revolutionary as the promise of the premise. All too often games are distinctive for the look of their characters alone. Look at *Tak And The Power Of Ju-Ju*. Beyond the character, is it any different from *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger*? Or *I-Ninja*, or *Spyro*, or whatever else?

Developers: stick to your guns. If you have a really, really neat idea for a game, don't feel you have to back it up with – oooh – a driving section, or hang-gliding, or a bit of stealth, or a bit that's slightly like part of *Tomb Raider 2*. Let it breathe. Let the idea develop into a full game. You don't buy a dog and then think 'People aren't going to find it interesting enough; I think I'll tape some wings to its back, make it wear a funny pumpkin man mask and hang carrots from its scrotum'.

Well, all right, maybe some of us do that.

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

prescreen

Incoming electronic entertainment from across the globe

Edge's most wanted

Far Cry Instincts

Navigating those jungles is going to feel a little different with a joypad, but hopefully not to *Instincts'* detriment. Shooting from a thundering jetski should be a riot.



(Xbox) Ubisoft

Dreamfall

No offence to Zoe and Kian, but catching up with April will make the *Longest Journey* follow-up like a fantasy Friends Reunited – even if she's gone goth.



Funcom (PC)

F.E.A.R

It's the detail in Monolith's environments that makes this stand apart from most other PC titles. Expect it to force thousands to upgrade their graphics cards.



(PC) Monolith

Unity

Good things take time, and *Jarjaz* things longer still, it seems. Even after 18 months of careful media avoidance, the Llama-Lion hybrid remains enticing.



(GC) Lionhead

Synchronicity

Why developers work too hard to cheat

When we reviewed *Driver 2*, we chastised it for being buggy despite having been in development for 'almost a year'. It seems quaint, now, that a year could seem like a long time. Game years now work a little like dog years, with perhaps two-and-a-half new game years to an old game year. So instead of finished games in 'almost a year', we have BioWare's tantalising *Dragon Age* (p34) – 18 months into development, with few details and even fewer screenshots available.

At the same time, the pace of change is quickening. It's partly down to where we are in the console lifecycle – PS2 is tamed, Xbox setting standards which seem more attainable by the day. It's partly down to talent, effort and imagination. Either way, in only the last six months games like *Prince Of Persia*, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Galleon* – all notable, all flawed – have redefined something as basic as how we move through a game world. What is it like to work on a project for three years when things are changing so fast? When each new release could invalidate or inspire a core part of your game?

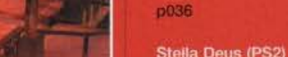
Sometimes it takes a heavy toll. *Half-Life 2* is going to struggle to convey the excitement of its physics when *Psi-Ops* (p100) has laid Havok's secrets bare for anyone who wants to play. *The Chronicles Of Riddick* (below) was literally beaten to the punch by *Breakdown*'s firstperson fisticuffs, reducing something it had hoped to be able to claim as a unique innovation to a silver medal.

It's little wonder, then, that BioWare wants to play its cards close to its chest. But it isn't because the company fears copycats. Most development cycles are too strictly controlled to allow a change of direction because someone saw something they liked in another demo. Indeed, most developers are too passionate about their own ideas to pilfer others. But what really keeps them safe is that many developers simply don't have time to play the games that might inspire them to plagiarise. *Riddick*'s designers, though they talk with fervent enthusiasm about games of the past, haven't played *Breakdown*. Nor had they heard that *Fight Night*'s analogue approach had beaten them to another punch. How could they? They've been working flat out for two whole years on *Riddick*.

Two whole years. Just how quaint is that going to sound in another generation's time?













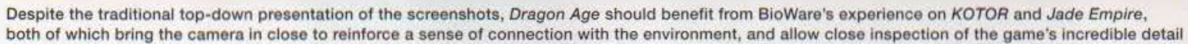
Dragon Age

That's Dragon Age as opposed to Stone Age, Bronze Age or A Long Time Ago In A Galaxy Far Far Away Age









Despite the traditional top-down presentation of the screenshots, *Dragon Age* should benefit from BioWare's experience on *KOTOR* and *Jade Empire*, both of which bring the camera in close to reinforce a sense of connection with the environment, and allow close inspection of the game's incredible detail

In an industry dominated by licences and sequels, BioWare's next step should have been obvious. *Knights Of The Old Republic* took an already potent licence and expanded its reach to a new and different audience of gamers. A sequel was surely inevitable. And so it proved, but not as you might think.

BioWare has passed development of *KOTOR II* on to Obsidian Entertainment, an offshoot of Black Isle, continuing the relationships that saw previous BioWare engines passed on for the development of games such as *Icewind Dale*. BioWare itself has instead taken the very bold decision to focus on purely original IP. One project is as yet unannounced, one is *Jade Empire* (previously in **E**131, **E**138), and the third is *Dragon Age*.

Set in an entirely new universe, *Dragon Age*'s story extends back into centuries of hidden history. "Each culture has its own history, art, architecture, language and psychology," explains **Scott Greig**, the game's project director/producer. "We are striving for what *feels* like a real living world – one that won't collapse if you apply the least bit of logic to it." The ruleset is also entirely new. Created specifically for videogaming rather than inheriting its ideas from tabletop RPGs, it brings its own benefits. "We've written a combat rules simulator, and we've already logged the equivalent of a million hours' pen-and-paper testing," Greig boasts.

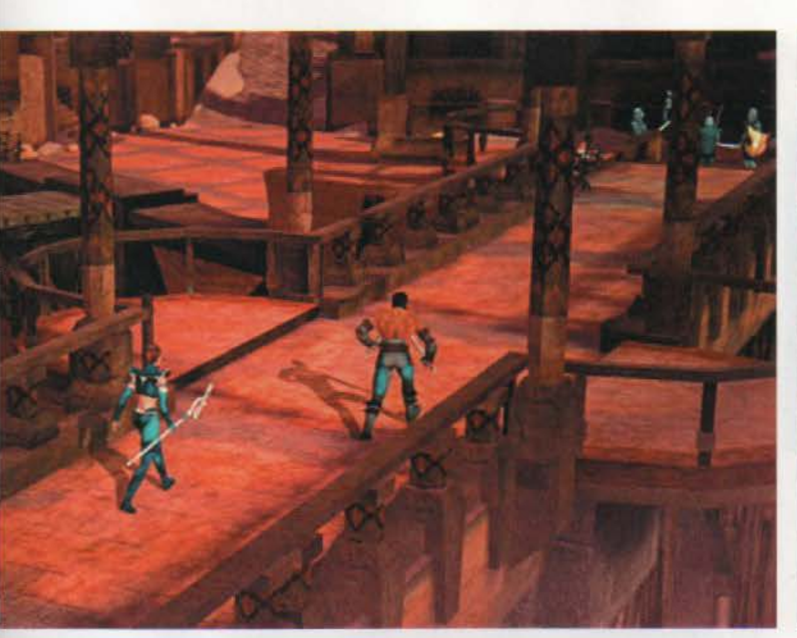
Melding *Baldur's Gate*'s top-down combat with *KOTOR*'s thirdperson adventuring, the game will follow a party of characters, each with a richly detailed back story and minutely customisable appearance and abilities. The plan is for a fully singleplaye fully multiplayer game, with the story tailored to meet the needs of each kind of adventure "By not having the multiplayer campaign tied to the singleplayer, we have freed ourselves from stopping the action for some conversations or cut-scenes," claims Greig. "In multiplayer, stopping the action is bad, sc we've come up with ways to advance the story without interrupting the enjoyment."

Also liberating is the experience of being 'off-licence'. "Having boundaries is good," acknowledges Greig, "because it forces you to focus in on the task in hand. But, no matt

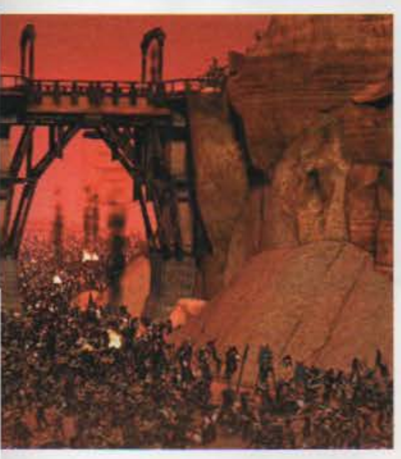
"We've written a combat rules simulator, and we've already logged the equivalent of a million hours' pen-and-paper testing"

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **BioWare**
Origin: **Canada**
Release: **TBC**

Previously in **E**138







how much you like the licence, you are limited in terms of the sweeping changes you can make. Building our own world is great because we're only limited by our imagination. Oh, and our budget."

It's clear that BioWare's intention is to merge the qualities that fuelled the brilliance of the games that made its name. Toolsets are promised to encourage the kind of user-created content that made *Neverwinter Nights*' modding community so vibrant. Although it won't be drawn on a projected release, it's clear *Dragon Age* has at least a year or two of work ahead. It's an ambitious manifesto, but it's hard to imagine safer pairs of hands than those at BioWare.



Character models are unusually detailed, with both facial and motion-captured body animation designed to communicate emotion and react sensitively to environmental changes. Your initial character choice substantially alters the starting point and plot evolution of *Dragon Age*'s story

Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders

It's been a battle getting here, but Xbox's Full Spectrum Dynasty Warriors is nearly ready



Ballistas were sadly not present in the preview missions – although having been on the receiving end of a catapult barrage, we can report siege engines are portrayed with suitably devastating effect



Never mind the crusades, the last two years have been a case of Developer Under Fire for Korean studio Phantagram. Production of its three PC/Xbox games – acrobatic action title *Strident*, cyberpunk RPG *Duality* and *KUF: The Crusaders* – ran afoul of strained relations with its publisher and part-owner, Korean MMORPG giant NCsoft. But after buying back its independence in time for Christmas 2003, Phantagram has concentrated on completing *The Crusaders*, a move that has encouraged Microsoft to publish it as a secondparty title in the US.

You can turn the tide of battle by defeating the enemy commander, or hack through the ranks until your unit gains the upper hand

It's not hard to see the attraction: the game rides both the enduring popularity of Koei's mass hack 'n' slash *Dynasty Warriors* series and the cinematic appeal of the Lord Of The Rings films' epic fantasy battles. It's also a fairly flattering demonstration of Xbox horsepower, featuring strong (if unashamedly pandering to the chainmail bikini school) art design reinforced by a sweeping, often awing depiction of scale. And the potential for Live play could be a significant notch on their online service's +10 Sword Of Wounding.

Chronicling the war between human factions and the inhuman Dark Legions, *The Crusaders'* singleplayer game is broken into four campaigns. Each follows the exploits of a war hero (or antihero) from the conflicting sides, offering interwoven viewpoints on the overall plot, and a varying play experience in terms of abilities and supporting units. Two were available in the preview build: the somewhat disarmingly named Gerald, a hulking, pious knight of the Hironeiden Kingdom, and Lucretia, a witch-captain of the scantily clad Dark Elf Legions. Typically, Gerald is slow but tough, and can block and counter attack opponents, whereas Lucretia is fast but frail, suited to circling enemies with speed dodges and dash attacks.

Your chosen hero and their two lieutenants take to the field at the head of an infantry unit, which can be set on the march by moving a beacon in the main game view, or on an RTS-style minimap activated with the right trigger. Secondary units under your command can be indirectly ordered to follow the hero's lead, or flicked to with the left trigger for individual instructions. Though the opening missions require only rudimentary flanking tactics and prioritising, there's certainly scope for strategy to play a more decisive role later in the game – with the system taking note of elevation, forest cover and even sun glare.

Even without tactical nuance, your army moves with an appealing sense of urgency and intent, and the enemy battle lines are equally foreboding. When the two clash, the





Though the sun-baked deserts of the Holy Land feature prominently, the war also rages through more fertile locales in the Hironeiden heartland, and take the fight into city and castle sieges

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Phantagram**
Origin: **Korea**
Release: **August 2004 (US), TBC (UK)**











The cinematic presentation of *The Crusaders* – shaky-cam footage of armies on the march, jump-cuts between the charging front lines, endless pans over sunlight glinting on metal – contributes enormously to the atmosphere. Better still, they're exclusively in-engine, so that atmosphere isn't dissipated as you take control from where the framing scenes end

camera thrusts forward with the front line's charge, transferring direct control to your hero in more familiar action territory. Equipped with light, heavy, and special attacks in addition to the ability to call on your lieutenants for tag-team support, you can turn the tide of battle by defeating the enemy commander, or simply hack through the ranks until your unit gains the upper hand. It's all suitably chaotic, if a little less refined than its contemporaries.

After a successful showing on the battlefield, participants gain levels and funding for the war effort, which can be put toward new equipment or changing your troops' specialist professions: the preview's glimpse of the Hironeiden upgrade chart traces a path from humble pikemen through heavy cavalry to imposing, cannonball-raining airships.

Outfitting displays the same light touch that runs through *The Crusaders* elsewhere: deep enough to provide a tangible sense of development, but not so much as to be bogged down in micro management.

The prospect of a strong singleplayer game is welcome, of course, but even more appealing is the game's proposed Live support. Featuring 'fourplayer team-up deathmatch', it's unclear whether this will be a limited hero-vs-hero affair or the full battle royale. If the second proves to be the case, the game will be a unique experiment in bringing the online RTS experience to console, as well as cause for celebration for armchair generals everywhere – no doubt working on their best Russell Crowe drawls in the run-up to release.

Stella Deus

Format: **PS2**
Publisher: **Atlus**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC (2004)**

Atlus' unexpected new strategy roleplaying game has a stellar development pedigree – and a storyline steeped in familiarity



Stop us if you've heard this one before. The power source of a prosperous culture fails, and in the ensuing mass panic their social order quickly follows it into ruin. A religious society, the Ekuwe, rescues civilisation from the brink of collapse, but also arrests its development for the centuries to come – until a charismatic ruler rises from among the downtrodden masses with the intention of bringing liberation by the sword. As you might expect, the home village of our unassuming teenage hero Sfida lies in the path of this looming battle between church and state.

Though Atlus' surprise strategy roleplaying game may be a tale as old as the stars, it's the telling that could shine. *Stella Deus'* development team includes creative directors from *Shin Megami Tensei*, *Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter*, and *Final Fantasy VII* through *X*, with *Final Fantasy Tactics* composers Hitoshi Sakimoto and Masaharu Iwata providing the score. With that in mind, it's fair to expect treachery, self-discovery and love among the ruins on a par with the cream of evocative Japanese RPG storylines; indeed, Atlus assures us that the game's theme will be 'very serious'.

Stella Deus' system appears similarly straight-laced. Combat plays out on traditional grid-based battlegrounds, and characters have a stock of regenerating Action Points with which to move, attack or use their currently equipped skills. These skills come in three categories: Action, which are chiefly special attacks, Support, which aid the character, and Effective Zone, which have a radius-based effect on neighbouring combatants.

A familiar selection of character classes – swordsmen, knights, monks and samurai, among others – can be upgraded into specialist classes, with higher levels reducing the Action Point costs associated with their area of expertise. Learning new skills, meanwhile, requires a steady income of Skill Points, which can be earned by defeating enemies or supporting allies.

Such textbook structure may not endear *Stella Deus* beyond those who made their pre-order after the second paragraph of this preview, but quiet revolutions are creeping into the most staid of Japanese genres, evidenced by titles as diverse as *Dragon Quarter*, *Disgaea* and *Final Fantasy XII*. As the first original, in-house strategy production since 1998's *Kartia* on PS1, Atlus has a lot to prove – and the development talent has every chance of ensuring *Stella Deus'* arid environments are fertile with imagination.



Though Sfida (above) appears to be the game's central figure, Ligne (right) is also shown adventuring solo, suggesting that the playable lead may well switch during the storyline

Trackmania: Sunrise

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Digital Jesters**
Developer: **Nadeo**
Origin: **France**
Release: **September**

Nadeo's undervalued Trackmania has a sunshine sequel: bring on the racing game's new dawn

Describing *Trackmania* as a driving game is like calling *R-Type* a thirdperson shooter: technically correct, but fundamentally missing the point. Part puzzle game, part old-school racer, the series is the closest gaming's ever got to recreating the thrill of Scalextric. It's not so much a game as a toyset – exactly the sort of thing developer Gary Penn has spent the last decade championing – and, for all its retro charms, it's one of the most forward-thinking games we have seen recently.

Why? Because Nadeo's emphasis on simplicity and community keeps production time low, development costs to a minimum, and in *Trackmania* has produced an easy-to-expand experience that users can be relied upon to enhance. Drawing up a new circuit in *Sunrise*, as in the original, is as simple as dropping a series of track sections around an empty level. Press Enter and the camera shifts to the car at the start line, and the circuit is yours to race against: shaving tenths of seconds here and there, then releasing it onto the net complete with your ghost for others to try to annihilate.

In truth, differences between the original and the sequel are not major – a few game modes here, some new car models there, and a lot more polish. It is recognisably *Trackmania*, albeit a brighter, bolder, faster experience. That'll be the sunrise, we suppose, reflecting off the uncomplex surfaces as you speed around your homebrew *F-Zero*. Non-trademarked Lamborghinis flock around the increasingly ludicrous circuits, shiny metal beasts with Tony Hawk's aerodynamic abilities.

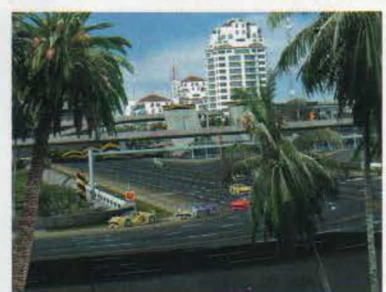
Perhaps that's the biggest change; players now have some semblance of control over the vehicles when they're in the air. It's not *F-Zero*'s full-on air steering, more like aftertouch, allowing dextrous drivers to make significant alterations to car trajectories mid-jump, or to twist their vehicles to meet the contours of the circuit. Driving purists could complain that it's unrealistic but, again, that's fundamentally missing the point. Let driving purists fantasise about gearshifting their way through *GT4*, while the rest of us dream of the arrival of a new set of toys.



Trackmania's customisation includes the ability to apply custom decals to vehicles













The add-on for the original, *Trackmania Power-Up*, added tunnels. Those return, though much of the claustrophobia they cause in 'normal' racers is absent as inter-car collisions are impossible



No clipping

Cars couldn't collide in *Trackmania*, just ghost through each other, and the same is true of *Sunrise*. Why? Nadeo's reasoning is severalfold. In a global game, modelling accurate collisions is impossible – sending a signal from Sydney to Paris might take a fraction of a second, but that might as well be a lifetime in *Trackmania*. Secondly, without collisions it's just the players against the track, a pure experience with timing records unmarked by fluke collisions. And, finally, it means there's no problem with people deliberately ruining others' games.

Hayarigami



Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Nippon Ich
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: August 2004 (Japan) TBC (UK

Disgaea's developer strays from strategy for an adventure with internal monologue and an unhealthy dose of blood







Self-question

伊藤香織の死は他殺だ。しかし自殺に見せかけて殺すなんて可能なのか？人見さんは自殺だと断言して

人見さんの誤診かもしれない

伊藤香織は何者かに自殺させられた

お前だ！

お前のせいで私はこんな目に遭ったのよぉお!!





Readers who remember the brief 16bit home system life of French graphic novel-to-game efforts, such as *Quest For The Time Bird*, may find *Hayarigami*'s hand-painted style familiar. It's a form that has endured in the east, despite its technical simplicity

Though Nippon Ichi has recently become synonymous with quirky strategy RPGs – *La Pucelle*, *Disgaea* and *Phantom Brave* – the developer's latest project is almost unrecognisably free of whimsy. A text-and-graphic adventure (with some scenes indicating that graphic is the operative word), *Hayarigami* has been timed to arrive for the Japanese summer: the traditional season for touring haunted locales or, for the less hardy, buying the crop of accompanying horror titles.

The game's protagonist is a city police sergeant investigating a series of events linked by urban legend – a setup that should have alarm bells ringing in the mind of even the most pragmatic detective. Interviewing the game's cast establishes connections between them on a plot chart, dubbed the 'Inference Logic' system, and the player's task is to follow these to their macabre conclusions.

Progress is made chiefly by uncovering evidence through dialogues – key words are highlighted for later reference against a database of superstitions – but also, in an interesting twist, through internal monologue. The hero is prone to internalising over the events of the unfolding storyline, and the player must ensure he remains focused on the chosen course of action – aided by an indicator of whether the trail is running hot or cold. Additionally, some decisions require use of the hero's faltering reserves of Courage Points. These cannot be recovered once spent, which may lead to paths later in the game becoming inaccessible due to premature bravery.

It's unclear whether the branching routes will be of a binary good/bad variety or more subtle (though multiple endings, doubtless invariably in tears, are assured), but Nippon Ichi's typically Byzantine system design could create some unexpected twists. Then again, the developer may just have a straightforward horror yarn to spin, and its fans are likely to be content with either outcome – eastern fans, at least.

The graphic adventure has long since fallen out of commercial favour in the west, and localisation efforts for visual novels are rare. Those unable to learn Japanese in time for the import can at least hope Nippon Ichi's dark side will one day manifest in the neatly tiled worlds of their specialist genre. Or hope that it doesn't, if you'd prefer your nightmares to be about bosses with astronomical hit points rather than corpses with gaping, eyeless sockets.

Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars



Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Cenega**
Developer: **Mithis**
Origin: **Europe**
Release: **September**

Squabbling, squawking and squishing in the latest title to kit out super furry animals with heavy weaponry



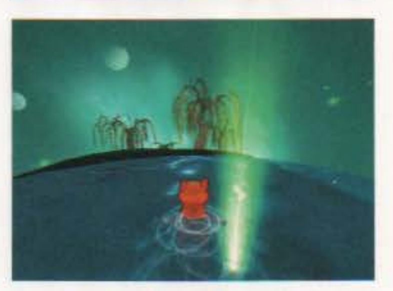
Explosive weapons, as is customary, crater the landscape down to water level, in addition to unceremoniously flinging any creatures who are caught up in the blast over the horizon

It's perhaps best not investigated why animal platoons warring in turn-based environments provide such enduring entertainment, but Mithis' stylised take proves that if a guinea pig toting a Kalashnikov is wrong, we don't want to be right. Though *Creature Conflict*'s proudest USP is a zoo's worth of species – baboons, rats, rabbits and wolverines among others – it's looking like an interestingly rounded game in other respects, too.

Rounded indeed, given the dinky worlds battle ensues over. In your selected creature's standard thirdperson view, the exaggerated curve of the horizon hints that the planet is smaller-than-life: launch a rocket, and the camera zooms out to follow its lazy arc around the globe. Though power-ups are available in the field, a pre-mission armoury offers an exhaustive selection of melee, ranged and incendiary weapons for a price, allowing you to customise your strategy for the mission.

Tasks range from free-for-alls to item hunts and, ultimately, toppling the opposing clans' bosses, although the marksmanship of the current enemy AI suggests this will be no mean feat. Thankfully, fourplayer support (hot-seat, LAN or internet) should provide more tangible targets for accusations of foul play, and the brisk pace sets it as a worthy new *Worms* surrogate.





This is a game that takes the 'world view' concept at face value (top): beacons mark power-up locations on your pole-to-pole assault

Tetsujin 28go

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Bandai**
Developer: **Sandlot**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Tokyo in the '60s – home of giant robots and small boys with remote controls. Perfect material for a videogame...





Shotaro, the all-too-human and all-too-small boy calling the shots, must keep out of massive trauma's way once an enemy robot appears



Number 28 and foes have been rendered with similar nostalgic care to the cast of Sega's recent PS2 *Astro Boy*. Sandlot's previous experience with massive metal melee points to a better-judged game experience, though

Bandai's relentless anime- and manga-to-game projects may have a blemished track record in terms of quality, but the range of subject material can't be faulted. A result of one such expedition into the company's back catalogue is *Tetsujin 28go* (Iron Man Number 28) based on an archetypal manga created by Mitsuteru Yokoyama that begat a 1960s television series.

Previously overlooked as a videogame property, the retro craze has made Tetsujin a viable licence to tap salaryman nostalgia. To this end, the game faithfully reproduces '60s Tokyo as a backdrop for its timeless tale of a boy and his remote-controlled giant robot. Tetsujin's ponderous movement is controlled with both DualShock sticks (as in Sandlot's previous *Robot Alchemic Drive*), and face buttons launch melee attacks, either bare-metal-knuckle or using uprooted local scenery for improvised weapons.

A 20-mission Story Mode containing both classic and original confrontations makes up the bulk of the title, but the Challenge Mode seems an even more appealing prospect, allowing two players to cooperate – well, we say cooperate, but we predict seismic collateral damage – through 40 smaller scenarios. Finally, a Vs Mode allows up to four players to engage in a distinctly un-cooperative battle royale.

The King Of Fighters: NeoWave

Format: **Coin-op**
Publisher: **Sammy**
Developer: **SNK Playmore**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **July (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Here comes an old challenger: it's not quite the Match Of The Millennium we were hoping for, but Neo-Geo vs Atomiswave isn't a total no-show



Tomokazu Nakano's stint on character art duties has left some fans bemused, but that will be the least of SNK Playmore's concerns



Not quite *KOF 2004*, *NeoWave* is in the unenviable position of being a transitional game – a test run for the marriage of SNK Playmore production and Atomiswave hardware. Though the in-game sprites, animation and voice samples appear largely unchanged from the Neo-Geo outings – *KOF 2002* in particular – the frontend, interface and 3D backgrounds clearly take advantage of Atomiswave's extra power.

Recycling aside, *NeoWave* has two attractive aspects: a generally excellent interpretation of the cast for their portraits, and a wide selection of systems cherry-picked from previous titles. Three fighting styles are available – Super Cancel, which allows chaining of super attacks; Guard Break, which is chiefly self-explanatory but also includes *Garou: Mark of the Wolves*' moment-of-impact Just Defense system; and MAX2, which allows a tide-turning super attack when less than a quarter of the player's life bar remains. Entirely new to the series is the introduction of a fifth button to toggle Heat Mode, during which the life bar is cannibalised to power up attacks.

There's enough craft on display to make this more than *KOF*'s redheaded stepchild – but *NeoWave* will chiefly be gauged as a warm-up for the real tournament.



In stills, the difference between the foreground and background is jarringly obvious, but in motion it's not quite as distracting. Hopefully the two will be more evenly matched in the next *KOF*

Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **BattleBorne**
Origin: **US**
Release: **July**

Previously in **E**133, **E**138

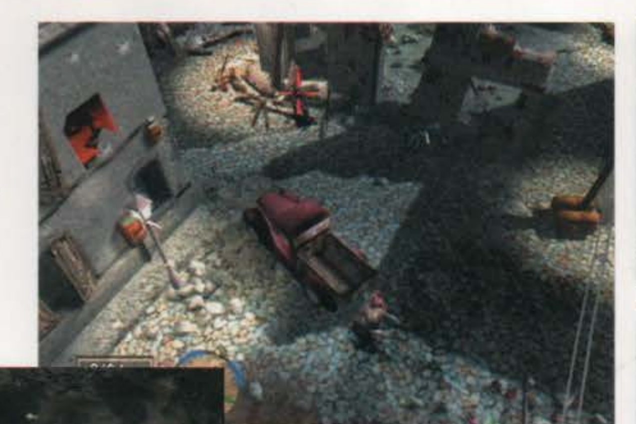
If you like your Second World War action to be more Cannon Fodder than Commandos, BattleBorne's first title may fit the bill

Combat Elite sets the two hemispheres of the brain at war, let alone the world powers of the day. Instinct says this is *Dark Alliance* with guns, a notion reinforced by familiar action prompts and the reassuring blue glow of pickups. Rational thought, in concert with repeated ignoble deaths in the Normandy mud, will quickly convince otherwise.

But not far enough otherwise to take *Combat Elite* into the fustiness of WWII RTS territory – it's still an action game. Though your paratrooper is almost realistically mortal under fire, applying a medikit will instantly heal his injuries, and though you'll occasionally fight behind AI-controlled allies, you'll overcome scores of German soldiers as a one-man army (or dynamic duo, with a cooperative second player).

Assuming players can tough out the initial acclimatisation period of repeated restarts, the outlook for the game is positive. Levels are brief but plentiful, taking in open combat, street fighting and frontal assaults with compelling rapid-fire succession.

Difficulty seems to stem more from making irreparable tactical blunders rather than any AI skill, but then maintaining the discipline required for *Combat Elite*'s unconventional pacing is much of the challenge.



Surviving urban combat requires getting to grips with *Combat Elite*'s twin-stick movement and targeting option, which is intially awkward but soon becomes second nature. The crouch toggle, on the stick button, is more troublesome





Charging enemy positions with guns blazing isn't the most sensible option, but it's certainly thrilling, and can catch opponents by surprise

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates

Oddworld: Stranger (working title)

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: EA
Developer: Oddworld Inhabitants





The curse of the western has seen the fourth Oddworld game suffer creative staff desertion and being dropped by Microsoft, but a new EA deal should rescue the (now multiplatform) title

Tenchu Kurenai

Format: PS2
Publisher: From Software
Developer: K2





The girl-ninja power *Tenchu* side story, focusing on Ayame and new character Rin, is on track for a late July release. Dual-victim stealth kills and the return of the ability to conceal bodies feature

Stolen

Format: PS2, other formats TBC
Publisher: Hip Interactive
Developer: Blue52





Blue52's high-tech heist title has kept far beneath the radar during its two years of development, but is finally preparing to break cover – although it's no longer a Sony-published PS2 exclusive

StarCraft: Ghost

Format: GC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Nihilistic





It's been a rough month for *Ghost*, with Blizzard delaying it until 2005 to 'expand and evolve the game design', while developer Nihilistic has apparently 'completed its contribution' to the title

Ribbit King

Format: GC, PS2
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Bandai





Bandai's frolf title – involving frogs and mallets, but not as unpleasantly as that suggests – gets a European tour courtesy of Atari. In practice it's more akin to adventure pinball than golf, though

Taiko Drum Master

Format: PS2
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house





Appearing at E3 with a high-resolution makeover, the localised *Taiko No Tatsujin* will reach the US in October – though it's hard to imagine the game repeating its wildly successful Japanese run

Deadlands

Format: PC, Xbox
Publisher: Headfirst
Developer: In-house





Typical: you wait 15 years for a fantasy western game and three come along at once. UK developer Headfirst's pistol-packing action game is set in the titular pen-and-paper RPG universe

Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Artoon





It seems churlish to ask 'why?', so we'll extend the benefit of the doubt to 'the world's first 5D game', which allows you to create a uniquely ugly feline avatar and take it into Live multiplayer

The chronicle of Riddick

The first two rules of every action movie tie-in are thirdperson and PlayStation2. Starbreeze's firstperson brawler is an Xbox exclusive. Why?

The game of the film used to be conceived the way some people watch pornography. Character development and back story would be fast-forwarded through in a rush to get to the 'good bits' – the car chases, the shootouts and the explosions, in this case. These would be clumped together into an awkward string of action scenes which left you feeling unsatisfied and faintly cheated. But an awful lot has changed about the game of the film, and leading the vanguard is *Riddick*.

The first change is the most significant: this isn't the game of the film. As Diesel buffs will be quick to explain, *Escape From Butcher Bay* is the prequel to Pitch Black whereas the film it accompanies is a follow-up, set five years after the original movie. Games simply take longer to make than films. It's worth pausing to absorb that, because it's changing the nature of the tie-in business. For games, a film licence used to be something of a shortcut – a ready-made roster of character designs and set-pieces they could plunder for their own needs. Now, if it's to be finished to coincide with release, the game has to be started *before* the film – an altogether trickier proposition. *Butcher Bay* was started so far in advance that the film hadn't officially been given the green light. It was this that made it inevitable that the story and shape of the game would be entirely separate from those of the film. It had to be a viable product in its own right in case the movie sequel never made it out of the gate.

This is by no means the only advantage. By tailoring a story to fit the game, you lose that fast-forwarding effect. *Butcher Bay*'s plot could be summarised on a beer mat: Riddick escapes from





The sci-fi starkness of the maximum-security prison contrasts with the opulence and squalor of the game's other settings









Normal mapping allows the low-polygon in-game model (left) to respond to light the way a high-polygon model would (centre), creating highly detailed and efficient results (right)

three prisons, each tougher than the last. The story of the game, however, is told in its action – every bullet you fire and wall you hug – and that's a tale many hours in the telling, and one which can only be narrated by the player. The structure – three prisons with three contrasting identities – perfectly serves a game narrative. As well as ensuring graphical variety, it guarantees gameplay flexibility – puzzle sections, gung-ho sections, cautious sections – without ever feeling contrived.

Breaking the rules

Even though the game is separate from the movie in nearly all respects, you might still expect the usual rules to apply. Most movie tie-ins are thirdperson, to allow players to see the character they've empathised with in the movie, and most are multiplatform, since the game is an exercise in milking extra revenue out of as many fans as possible. Starbreeze explains that Vivendi Universal was open-minded from the start. That said, the initial reaction to the idea that *Butcher Bay* could be firstperson *and* have hand-to-hand fighting was decidedly sceptical.

What allowed Starbreeze to carry the day was how quickly the in-house engine enabled it to prototype. Although still an involved and complex process, it moved through several iterations of fighting systems – some too monotonous, some too complex – before settling on a middle ground. With a simpler version of *Fight Night*'s analogue controls, Riddick can deliver hooks, uppercuts and elbows by combining the right trigger with tweaks of the left stick. To ensure the perspective doesn't leave you open to attacks from your blind spots, Starbreeze has taken the unlikely step of making Butcher Bay's inhabitants fight like gentlemen: in straight fist fights, they'll only attack one at a time. It sounds a little feeble, but in practice it makes fighting feel focused, confident and satisfying.

Even once this argument was won, Starbreeze couldn't take the shift to firstperson for granted. *GoldenEye* didn't need to let you see Bond, because Bond is already ingrained into all our minds. Starbreeze did need to let you see Riddick, but didn't see why that should stop it making a proper FPS. The solution was to let Riddick live through his shadow. Every wall you pass gives you a glimpse, perfectly capturing the muscled loll of his neck and the taut prowl of his walk. Any complex action – using machines or climbing up crates – is handled by a mini cut-scene, which cleverly sidesteps the horrors of FPS jumping and ladder-handling while letting you watch Riddick at his most athletic and powerful.

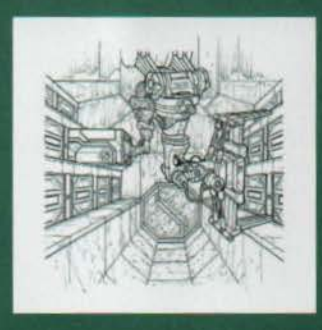
If these decisions explain away the perspective revolution, then how did Starbreeze

Games simply take longer to make than films. It's worth pausing to absorb that, because it's changing the nature of the tie-in business: the game has to be started *before* the film

Guerillas

The Riddick brand is already widely diversified, with each branch able to sustain itself alone should one of the others falter. As well as the film, there's an anime directed by The Animatrix's Peter Chung, and a novel by Alan Dean Foster. The first chapter of this is available as an unlockable in *Riddick*, as are production drawings from the game and the film.









Riddick's eyeshine (main) reveals hidden horrors, but other light-based effects, such as muzzle flashes and his own looming shadow, are just as dramatic in brighter areas





swing the Xbox-only idea? There is, of course, the fact that there might well be a very precise correlation between Xbox owners and Vin Diesel fans in the first place, but the reasons why Starbreeze wanted the game to be exclusive are clear from the screenshots that accompany this article. *Riddick* is able to look so lavishly detailed thanks to normal mapping, the technique allowing lower-polygon game models to reflect light as though they were much more detailed than they really are. It's an innovation that makes Riddick's world an unusually tactile one. The way light plays off the rust and scree of the mine walls is a world away from the gleaming velvets and mahoganies of the prison owner's mansion.

Gratuitously violet

Light, of course, has to be the key to any Riddick game. *Butcher Bay*, more than anything, is the tale of how he receives his mysterious 'eyeshine' – hypersensitive vision that allows him to see in the dark. It becomes the core of *Riddick*'s gameplay, giving you a flexible, unrationed stealth ability that allows a free flow of play between shadow-hopping and gun-blazing. Once in eyeshine mode, Riddick's viewpoint warps and tints, turning the world into a fish-eyed haze of violet and indigo. Here he can see perfectly, snapping oblivious necks while his opponents shuffle nervously into the black.

However, eyeshine leaves him vulnerable – bright light, any light, will dazzle him as well as exposing him, meaning guards with torches suddenly become more dangerous than those with Uzis. Even in lit areas, a simple stealth mode is triggered whenever Riddick crouches, and the whole screen phases subtly towards blue whenever he's safely hidden. It's a blindingly obvious and effective solution, instantly rendering Sam Fisher's shadow meter and Garrett's gem irrelevant and clumsy.

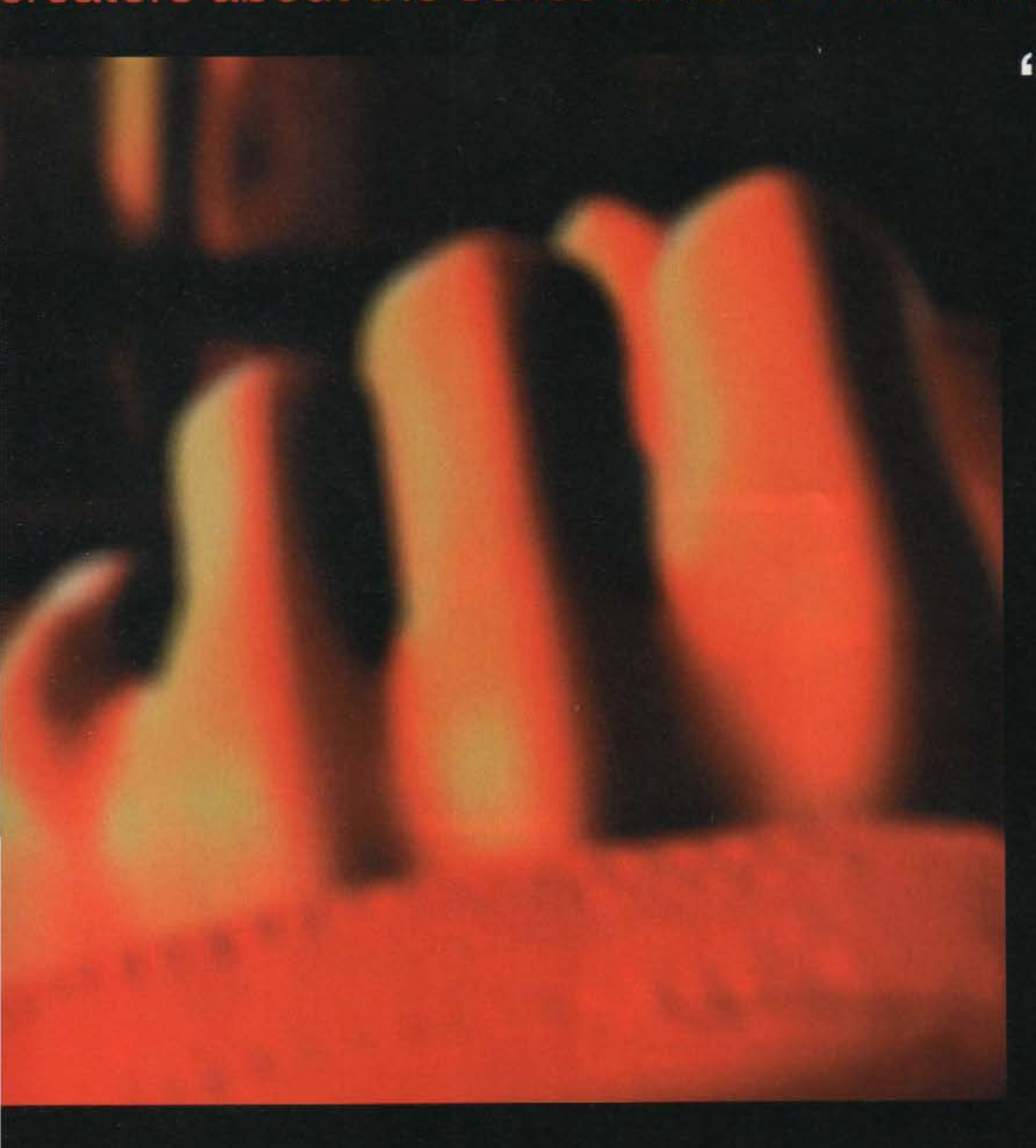
There's no doubt that Diesel's role was influential in *Butcher Bay*'s unusual genesis. Himself a gamer, he's passionate enough to have founded his own game studios, Tigon, which acted as script consultant on the game. Yet to complete a title of its own, it would be easy to dismiss the company as a vanity project. However, its contribution has a powerful impact on the game. When faced with simple dialogue trees during cell-bound conversations, your heart sinks a little. All too often in games, picking a positive response will lead your character to chirp some bland soundbite, killing any sense of connection with the character. Tell Riddick to help someone and he'll snarl "I don't do favours," allowing you to lope off and complete the task with your reputation – and suspension of disbelief – intact.

The game of the film used to be a guarantee of conservatism and a badge of mediocrity. But as game budgets balloon and films are forced to be lighter on their feet, an opposite trend is emerging. It's becoming harder for games to be tied in with one specific film, and canny publishers seek ongoing, flexible projects. As *Riddick* shows, this enables – perhaps forces – the games they make to be imagined on their own terms, and points the way to a new and mutually respectful chapter of their relationship with film.

Renaissance men



The death and rebirth of Iron Fist: we talk to Tekken's creators about the series' ambition to reclaim the arcades



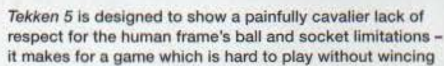
"Heihachi Mishima is dead." Admit it: no matter how lapsed a *Tekken* fan you are, the demise of its shock-haired megalomaniac father figure is an attention-grabber. The more cynical may feel that he at least outlived the prospects of the series, after *Tekken 4* largely failed to recapture the original trilogy's iconic status. But Namco's brief E3 footage of *Tekken 5* suggested a death in the family could be just what the Iron Fist Tournament needs to bring wayward players home.

Under production for nearly a year now, *Tekken 5*'s team began as a 20-strong nucleus of series veterans whose experience dates back to the first title. Further members have joined the project through the course of development to swell the ranks up to 130. In an interestingly communal twist, however, changes in Namco's internal structuring have seen both the VS Team studio name and the individual job titles within it dropped. Our interview with developers **Katsuhiro Harada** and **Yuichi Yonemori** (previously producer and designer, respectively) opens with them introduced simply as "members of the *Tekken* team."

The important question first, then. "Yes, he is dead!" Harada answers earnestly. Our attempt to keep a similarly straight face is obviously less successful. "I know. Nobody wants to believe us on this," sighs Yonemori, with the feigned resignation of someone who knows full well the odds against the earth settling on the grave of a legendary fighting game villain.

At least suspension of disbelief will be aided by the impressive turnout of attendees to Heihachi's funeral. Including the three new entrants (see 'Characters, selected'), Harada assures us that the 21 fighters featured in the E3 video are the minimum number players can expect for *Tekken 5*'s roster. "We think *Tekken 4* was suffering from a lack of characters, and players were quite upset about that," he explains. "So we are studying a line-up that will answer everybody's expectations." In addition to a wide





Tekken 5 is designed to show a painfully cavalier lack of respect for the human frame's ball and socket limitations – it makes for a game which is hard to play without wincing

selection at first play, there will be an unlockable contingent: Harada evades the specifics of who and how, but it can be assumed that the traditional time-based unlock system will be reprised.



Too much realism

Both developers are candid about *Tekken 4*'s mixed reception, and feel that it was a necessary learning experience for the future direction of the series.

"Tekken 4 became too realistic. Which was a great technical achievement, but what players wanted was a much more manga-like design"

"Our objective with *Tekken 4* was very much about realism," Yonemori says, "but by doing so, we forgot about the 'sokaikan' – the pleasure you feel from the game experience."

Realising this, it was decided that the central concept of *Tekken 5* should be expressing the essence of sokaikan, and with it an accessible, rewarding game system for the player. To this end, the free-flowing aerial combo system featured in the first three games has been reinstated, and *Tekken 4*'s obstacles modified to be less obstruction, more gratifyingly destructible prop. Walls, floors and columns can now be shattered in the style of anime brawls (and, indeed, competitor *Dead Or Alive*). "This time, you can destroy things and this will be translated into pleasure," explains a visibly excited Harada. "Your character will not be handicapped or wounded by the destruction process – it is pure fun."

Emphasis on this larger-than-life atmosphere is another area in which he feels *Tekken 5* will improve over its immediate predecessor. "In *Tekken 4* the environments and characters became too realistic," he says. "Which was a great technical achievement, but what players wanted was not photorealistic visuals but a much more manga-like design. So for *Tekken 5*, characters are much more charismatic and stylised, and effects much more spectacular."

This stylisation is also evident in the new arenas, which range from a towering, windswept temple summit, through a sun-drenched glass-and-chrome Namco cityscape, to a pirate grotto strewn with doubloons that scatter at every bone-breaking throwdown. They're extravagant enough to be

The detail on the costumes – particularly in trousers – is magnificent. Here's hoping the developers have had an eye on Tecmo's profitable *DOA:XBV* bikini sideline



CHARACTERS, SELECTED

FENG WEI
"We noticed Paul was very popular among players all over the world, so we thought it would be fun to have an Asian Paul," Harada explains. A jujutsu master, Feng Wei does not follow the fighting game stereotype of the slow, technical Chinese martial artist. Instead, his moves are extremely powerful and rapid. "We needed an Asian character with a very powerful image. He does not care about style or finesse," says Yonemori.

ASUKA KAZAMA
Asuka is the first Kansai (the region of Japan formed by Kobe, Osaka and Kyoto) character in fighting games. "I know this will be an alien cultural point for western players," says Yonemori, "but it will come across in the way she is not feminine or delicate, but very dynamic and strong." The cousin of *Tekken 2*'s Jun Kazama, she will fight with a refined version of Jun's dance style, in addition to bringing along some surprise moves of her own.

RAVEN
Tekken 5's new ninja character is already famous. "People keep comparing him to the actor Wesley Snipes," Harada smiles. Though Yoshimitsu is the series' resident ninja, Yonemori felt they needed a ninja that was "not so bizarre, and more cool." As a special forces operative with Ninjutsu training, expect a mix of action-movie flair with businesslike, precision strikes – and a minimum of "magic tricks."





Yuichi Yonemori



Katsuhiro Harada







Format: **Coin-op, PS2**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2004 (coin-op) 2005 (PS2)**

Although still coy about the details, it's clear that the team is planning a rather theatrical range of accessories. It's unlikely that these will have an impact on fighting abilities, although the threat of being beaten by a man wearing a pirate hat could provide a certain edge of desperation



mistaken for *Soul Calibur* locations at a distance; perhaps a more overt move away from realism than the series has ever featured before. In terms of gameplay features, the dalliance with uneven floors is over, but Yonemori indicates there will be greater variations in size and structure between stages.

Which is all beginning to sound fairly taxing on the System 246 arcade board's humble PS2-based architecture. "I don't know if it is OK at this stage to speak about this, but there is a board a little bit superior to the standard System 246." confides Harada. "The version displayed on video at E3 was already running smoothly on System 246,"

The stylisation is also evident in the new arenas, which range from a towering, windswept temple summit, through a sun-drenched Namco cityscape

continues Yonemori, "but we are thinking about how we could get greater effects with this new system." The upgraded board is still broadly similar to the original, but offers a faster processor speed and more RAM – which would result in a greater visual discrepancy between the arcade and the inevitable PS2 version than was evident with *Tekken 4*. "*Tekken 5* is intended to run on PS2 so it runs 'just' smoothly on System 246," Harada says. "'Just' may sound negative for System 246, but it is the idea. If you use the system power of the System 246 correctly, you can do lot of things with it. We used the board almost poorly with *Tekken 4*, making the system calculate so many things at the same time, such as the undulation of the floor – having put this aside, we have an enormous amount of power to use for other game elements."

As for conversions to more powerful technology, the developers say their efforts are still focused on the arcade version for the foreseeable future, and a multiplatform release has not yet been discussed. "I'm not sure if multiplatform releases are a good or bad thing," says Harada. "You need to add specific content to each version to please every platform's users, but this makes the game very expensive if a user wants to experience every version."

And the arcade game alone has the potential to be very expensive for dedicated users to experience. The key features of the modern Japanese arcade – IC card and network support – are both featured in *Tekken 5*, with card save available to store the items and apparel your character wins through play (as in *Virtua Fighter 4*'s three incarnations). Network support is more novel. Online fighting has been judged impossible, but character information and fighting records will be saved to a central server. In addition to online rankings, 'ghosts' of the best characters will be able to appear as opponents on other machines. "We introduced the 'ghost' feature with *Soul Calibur 2*. Now we want to run it over the network," Yonemori explains.

However, the implications of marauding ghost



fighters have also proved the team's most difficult challenge, according to Harada. "When you develop a fighting game, you balance it so the player can clear it in a given time frame," he begins. "A reasonable player would be able to get up to this stage with a given amount of ¥100 coins. But when you add the network feature, this process is somewhat changed and we have to redefine our references. And, as this is our first network title, we have no references!"

Unfortunately, it's doubtful western players will experience the culmination of their efforts. The network support is initially limited to Japanese arcades, and is unlikely to find favour, or financial incentive, elsewhere. Some small consolation is that if online matching is the team's main area of concern, it bodes well for the game. They seem supremely confident of their decisions over what should be added, tweaked or kept unchanged in all other aspects of the game.

The latter includes the control method, with *Tekken 5* using the same joystick and four-button setup as its predecessors, and the game system itself will be largely unembellished from *Tekken*s past. "While others are trying to add new features on the already existing ones, we are following a reverse path toward simplicity. *Tekken* was already quite a simple game but we think we can do it even simpler," says Yonemori. Harada agrees: "I think from a user's point of view, *Tekken 5* is friendlier than *Tekken 4*. We are trying to identify the aspects people have trouble with, like features that were difficult to use, understand, or simply made no sense in the game. We want to change those. But I also think in many cases you would need to be a hardcore player to understand these issues, and such players will certainly appreciate these changes when playing."

"Tekken 5 is friendlier than Tekken 4. We are trying to identify the aspects people have trouble with or simply made no sense. We want to change those"

How successful the game will be in recapturing the *Tekken* spirit – or whether a game with a theme of unabashed enjoyment can still hold its own against the dizzying depths of *VF4* – will become clearer after the first location tests. "The greatness about this game cannot be explained without having a controller in your hands. I mean, it is very fun to play," Yonemori assures us. "We are at the point where we are seeing the sokaikan idea taking shape and delivering its potential." That potential is to be all things to all fans, as Harada outlines: "This time, we are arriving at a level we are pretty sure fans of every *Tekken* will find a common ground with. I also believe that people who have given up playing previous versions of *Tekken* would be interested in coming back."

And that's a sensation that was echoed by E3 attendees, on message boards across the internet, by workmates crowding around a quarter-screen movie on a desktop – that perhaps we had all been waiting for *Tekken* to make a triumphant return, after all. The King of Iron Fist is dead. Long live *Tekken 5*.









The latest model Jack-5 strikes an imposing presence. It's doubtful that his self-destruct feature, which brings about Heihachi's death in the opening movie, will be available as an in-game attack – sad news for any player partial to cheap shots such as Roger/Alex's Gigaton Punch





TRIBAL DIFFERENCES

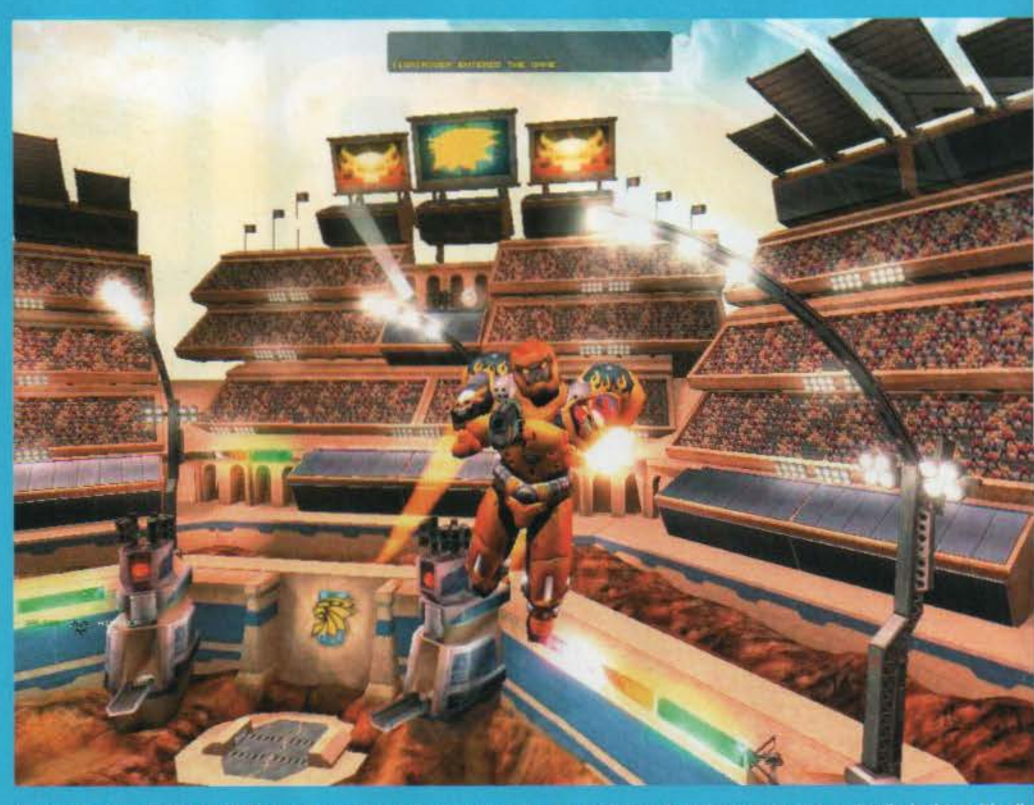
The original high-flying shooter finally returns – and now even solo pilots have reason to take to the skies

Jetpacks. Everyone loves jetpacks. They're the professional's choice. It's one thing to be able to steal a few quick kills by pelting through tight, hellish corridors with a rocket launcher in one hand and some futuristic plasma cannon in the other, randomly spraying vivid deathbolts at everyone who crosses your path, but it's quite another to do it as you slice through the air, casually ducking and spiralling through turret fire, and nailing a pesky opponent straight out of the air with a well-aimed Spinfusor disc. Just ask any Tribesman.

The original *Tribes*, developed by Dynamix and released on PC in 1998, was an online revolution. Not only did it totally rewrite the rulebook on what FPS games in general could do, it was the first mainstream action game designed specifically for the multiplayer market. Unsurprisingly, it was never released on its own in modem-struck Britain, but after an enthusiastic response from players in the US, it was subsequently made available in the UK as a compilation release with its sister game, the giant stompy-mech sim *Starsiege*. Now, it's back with a vengeance.







Gladiators, circa 2492. Not all the levels are set in wide-open arenas – the smaller-scale variety can be just as deadly. In these, it's all about mastering the jetpacks, getting those crucial hits in before anyone shoots you down, and playing to the crowd (if time permits)



It's hard to overstate just how far ahead of the times *Tribes* really was. In 1998 – an era when most were content with churning out *Quake*-style corridor shooters – *Tribes* provided huge, open-air maps, with green hills and snowy valleys seamlessly merging into sprawling (and often floating) military bases. Every single weapon required skill to use, from the powerful mortars that could shut down an entire base to the Spinfusor, capable of delivering explosive Tron-style discs across entire maps. *Tribes* even had vehicles, both ground-based personnel carriers and flying scout ships capable of zooming across the map and strafing enemies from afar. It wasn't perfect, and nobody would ever claim it was – but the sheer amount of innovation in it more than made up for the rough graphics and occasionally clunking game mechanics.

Jet set

New game *Tribes: Vengeance* is being developed by the Australian sister studio of US developer Irrational Games. Originally founded to develop likeable comic-book RPG-RTS hybrid *Freedom Force*, this will be its first crack at the *Tribes* universe, and it intends to stick closely to the original formula. The approach is in contrast to the competition, which often remains obsessed with out-deathmatching *Counter-Strike*. Instead, Irrational has been taking the time to turn its much-loved jetpack action into a brand new singleplayer experience. It's perhaps not that surprising a development: Irrational was co-founded by Ken Levine, who wrote the story for the first *Thief* game and was lead designer on *System Shock 2*. Although based in the US, he will be overseeing the development of *Vengeance*'s engaging plot. "[The publisher's] idea was not just to do some crummy tutorials, but a full campaign comparable to any dedicated game," explains **Ed Orman**, the project's lead designer. "The split's roughly 50/50, but definitely tied to its roots as a multiplayer game."

It's hard to overstate just how far ahead of the times Tribes really was. In 1998 it provided huge, open-air maps – green hills and snowy valleys merging into sprawling military bases

Fortunately, it's not tied too tightly. *Vengeance* isn't simply a tedious *Unreal Tournament*-style rehash of the multiplayer maps but rather a full, narrative-driven adventure in its own right. It just happens to be one that simultaneously takes you from struggling novice to master Tribesman, as well as giving you essential hands-on experience with all the vehicles, weapons and power armour combinations. Convenient, isn't it? "The missions were built around the plot," explains Orman. "We took the tribes and kit we wanted, pacing them out over the singleplayer game, but they're all there to tell the story."

While it's too early to say how the whole adventure









ribes has always specialised in wildly different locations, from lush green planets to burning deserts and lava soaked hellholes. The ifferences are largely aesthetic, but always good looking. The new custom models for each side really help give life to the universe

ans out, it's certainly more than a glorified tutorial. For tarters, the plot itself is an intriguing one – chopping and hanging between a number of characters and time eriods in the *Tribes* universe, and turning what was reviously Red vs Blue with slightly different names into a roper war. In particular, while your choice of tribe in the multiplayer game is not simply one of aesthetics, every roup in the singleplayer campaign has been designed to elp push the story forward. Different factions have their wn armouries and look and feel, from the Phoenix Guards' rounded armour to the jagged buildings and acilities of a Blood Eagle installation. More importantly, ach has AI specifically tailored for the needs of the missions and the plot, rather than simply running around ke devil-may-care tournament bots.

Jetski

/hile most missions are still firmly under wraps, sample evels we've played involved riding shotgun on an rmoured gunship before detaching to go skiing through anyons under heavy turret fire. Yes, that's right: skiing. A *ribes* level is anything but – alive with more hills than The Sound Of Music, not to mention towering mountains and echoing canyons you really don't want to have to cross on foot every time you die. Luckily, you don't have to. Hit the space bar as you land on a slope and a second set of jets kick in, sending you sliding across the map at a terrific pace. Like everything in *Tribes*, it's a balancing act, where each movement mode has its advantages and dangers. Jetpack up in the air and you're harder to hit, extremely manoeuvrable and immune to the splash damage of your enemy's explosive weapons – but that's no use to you unless you can pilot it properly. Similarly, skiing will get you from A to B blindingly fast, but since you'll have all the manoeuvrability of a charging rhino, you'll be much more vulnerable to attack along the way.

"What has always drawn me to *Tribes* was the freedom of movement," comments **Michael Johnston**, the man behind the multiplayer. "In every other FPS out there, everyone's always running around at the same speed. The ability to do things like ski and jetpack and drive vehicles is what really makes *Tribes* stand out in the crowd."

It's against other people that all this complexity really comes into its own. While multiplayer mode is undeniably familiar, it's not as though there's ever been a surfeit of jetpack-skiing-plasma-rifle games, and it's a unique

JOIN UP TODAY

In preparation for *Tribes: Vengeance*, Vivendi has released the original *Tribes* for all to download, both at its own website and at file portal www.fileplanet.com. *Tribes 2* is also technically available, but here's the catch: the CD keys you'll need to actually play the thing aren't as freely available as the game itself. They were heavily limited on release for reasons that remain baffling, and have long since run out. Don't be fooled by the fact that you can download the client software – it's a wasted download.

Once *Tribes* is installed, you'll have to get patched up before you can play. Ignore the auto-update feature – it won't even pick up the fact that you're connected to the net. You'll find all the patches you need at www.tribalwar.com/rdb/index.php?catid=142

Even if you're au fait with other FPS games, *Tribes* takes a lot of getting used to. You'll have to learn when the jetpack will fire you up into the air and when it'll simply slow your fall, practice leading enemies with your sparkling Spinfusor disc, and, ultimately, decide which of the suits and weapons best suits your method of play. *Tribes* is a team game, so at least you'll have backup as you learn. Just remember – to fight alone is to die.



LICENCE TO THRIVE

Tribes 2 has found a valuable new life outside the battlefield, courtesy of GarageGames and the Torque Game Engine. During one of Sierra/Vivendi's many culls in recent years, Dynamix – the original developer of *Tribes*, and creator of many other PC titles, including *The Incredible Machine* and *Red Baron* – found itself on the chopping block. Many of the departees decided that they'd had enough of the mainstream industry and founded GarageGames (www.garagegames.com) to cater for independent developers.

The new company bought the rights to use the *Tribes 2* engine, making it available for $100 per programmer. For that, you get the engine, editors and all the source code. More importantly, you don't have to publish through GarageGames, and there aren't even any royalties to pay until your company hits the $250,000 mark (commercial licences are also available, should you manage to achieve that). Of course, it's not exactly the old engine – GarageGames has been polishing it up and improving it over the last few years, most recently adding a shader-focused expansion (another $295) to help finished games stand up to the likes of *Doom 3*.

In practice, GarageGames' current selection of titles is rather less ambitious, including a cut-down version of *The Incredible Machine* entitled *Chain Reaction*, battling robots in *Think Tanks*, and other simple but fun games. The most complicated of the lot is *Realm Wars* (www.garagegames.com/mg/projects/realmwars), designed as a community-created shooter. Progress has been slow, to put it bluntly, but it's a good idea. Just don't lay out that $100 without double checking exactly what you're getting – it's a full engine, not a game development kit. If you're an experienced coder, it could well be worth the investment, but consider instead a dedicated game development language such as Blitz3D if you're taking your first steps into programming.



equation that Irrational has given a total overhaul. Having played *Tribes*' disappointing sequel when it was released, Johnston is quick to soothe fears over the direction being taken. "Yeah, agree totally," he says when we bring up the subject of *Tribes 2*'s ludicrously large maps. "In *Tribes 2* you'd often be walking around forever without encountering anything. We're definitely more in the vicinity of the first game – making it all more intuitive, so a new player can do things like just look up at a platform and jet straight there without getting frustrated."

And indeed they have. As well as smoothing over the general combat experience, *Tribes*' jetpacks have received a much-needed power boost. While previous models would get you up in the air, they all but required you to rocket yourself in the foot to actually get airborne. Players had to devote ridiculous amounts of practice before they could simply leap up off the ground and land smoothly at their destination, instead of running off the edge of a cliff and heading groundwards with a feeble 'Pfft'. *Vengeance* is smoother, and while mastering the art of aerial combat still requires practice, getting around is much easier.

The new vehicle loadout runs along a similar theme. While the basic collection may seem familiar enough – *Halo*-style jeeps, gunships and other standard military hardware being the order of the day – each has its own special feature. The tank is a perfect example, trundling around the hilly landscape as you'd expect, but with the option to bounce into the air and cross any obstacles in its way. More inventive still is the new mobile base, which comes fitted with a spawn point and an inventory station, giving a team the ability to pull up alongside an enemy installation and rejoin the fight as soon as they die, keeping the action focused without limiting freedom.

While the online gaming industry is very different to how it was when *Tribes* first debuted on the shelves, and games like *Counter-Strike*, *Battlefield 1942* and *PlanetSide* have all helped bring multiplayer shooting into the mainstream, it's impossible not to have a soft spot for the game that kicked it all off. Even the original *Tribes* feel remains unmatched – the wind whistling through your hair as you grab the flag, ski down the side of the base and vanish into the skies in one smooth move, before an exploding disc sends you flying and replaces elation with the ache of defeat. If *Tribes: Vengeance* can manage to bring just that into the modern world, it will have done its job. And when it comes wrapped in a singleplayer story overseen by a man whose ability to craft narrative and atmosphere shines through his revered back-catalogue, there's every reason for the frag-phobic to consider joining the action.

"We're more in the vicinity of the first game – making it all more intuitive, so a new player can do things like just look up at a platform and jet straight there without getting frustrated"



Be careful – just because you've got a large, heavily armoured killing machine at your disposal doesn't mean that the humble foot soldiers can't send you tumbling to the ground. What's more, your poor flying will take your passengers down with you









Photography: **Nick Wilson**

Capcom's king of casual

Keiji Inafune is now head of R&D at Capcom, but he's not about to combine a suit and tie with his infamous Hawaiian shirts. Instead, he intends to instil a climate of creative fearlessness

Last time we saw **Keiji Inafune**, enjoying the Los Angeles sunshine at E3, he was wearing a bright blue American football shirt, shorts and Nike Air-Force Ones. He looked more like a local kid on his way to sports practice than someone who had just been made overall head of R&D at one of Japan's biggest game software companies. Today, on a humid June afternoon in Hammersmith at the end of three-day press tour promoting *Onimusha 3*, Inafune has aged considerably. Having said that, he still looks nothing of his 39 years, and breaks into a broad, mischievous grin with little prompting. We're also treated to a fine example from his evidently sizeable collection of flamboyant shirts.

"When you get promoted to a certain level, you're expected to wear a suit and tie," says Inafune, solemnly. "For me, that's the end of the world. Freedom is necessary for creative thought, so you have to feel that you aren't stifled by anything – especially not by what you are wearing. Clothes are important, they reflect your personality, and if you are in the business of making games then you have to inject a little of your personality into them."

Inafune is keen to remind us that, while he may have taken a step up the corporate ladder, he retains a largely creative brief. He certainly makes an unlikely executive. Apart from his idiosyncratic wardrobe choices, he's a graphic designer by education, entering the videogame industry at a particularly opportune time. The Famicom had just been released, offering a new level of graphical sophistication in games, and Inafune exploited a new demand for artists to work alongside programmers as development teams expanded in size. He toured the software companies of Tokyo with sketchbooks full of his own characters, inspired by classic Japanese anime such as Tetsuwan Atom (Astro Boy), Gatchaman (Battle Of The Planets), Mazinger Z and the work of 'mangaka' such as Osamu Tezuka and Go Nagai. Capcom showed an interest, originally hiring Inafune on a part-time basis to contribute the winning and losing faces for the characters of the original *Street Fighter* coin-op. When finally offered a permanent contract with the company he grasped the opportunity with both hands: Megaman, the first character he designed from scratch, went on to become an enduring Capcom icon.

"It was natural for me to draw on the comics of my childhood," says Inafune, acknowledging Megaman's debt to Astro Boy. "I wanted to draw a character that could be regarded as classic, not just something that was fashionable for the time. But I never had any idea that Megaman would become so popular or last for so long. I was working too hard to think about that kind of thing. For the first Megaman game I had to design all of the characters, the logo, the backgrounds and





Octavius's sections in *Shadow Of Rome* are unlikely to be confused with any other stealth title. Breaking and entering under the glare of the Mediterranean sun and concussing senators with carefully placed banana skins is a novel take, although sources of tension are currently unclear

the promotional artwork. Looking back, I could say that I really tried to give Megaman a sense of energy and maybe that was a reason why he became a hit."

Despite this relatively immediate success, it took Inafune many years to climb the ladder within Capcom. Like most Japanese companies, it operates a typically hierarchical structure based on experience and lengthy paying of dues. Inafune concentrated on *Megaman* and its spin-offs for ten years, eventually becoming more involved in planning than designing. "Actually there were young character designers joining the company who I thought were better than me," he says, "or at least had more technical skill, so I realised it would be advantageous to learn about the whole aspect of putting a game together. When Capcom introduced the producer system, I jumped at the chance."

What was it like working with Mikami? "He has a capacity to understand his staff and get the best out of them, which is a quality I have tried to emulate," says Inafune. He also has great vision, and he won't allow it to be compromised. When he has decided something, he can't be persuaded otherwise, which can a be very positive trait but it also means that all his games tend to get delayed..."

Freedom

Finally allowed to run with an idea of his own, Inafune opted to pay tribute to the samurai movies of Kurosawa. With the possibilities for what adventure games could achieve expanding rapidly, Inafune explains that the worldview of Seven Samurai and Kagemusha were as important to *Onimusha* as obvious visual signifiers such as costumes and weapons. "I love those movies and I think they have a special place in the Japanese consciousness," says Inafune. "That's what I wanted to evoke with *Onimusha*."

Originally based on the *Resident Evil 2* engine before development switched to PS2, how was Inafune able to prevent *Onimusha* being viewed simply as *Resi* with swords? "Obviously we did have to rebuild that engine significantly for the PS2. At that point our focus became the action – to implement a more satisfying combat system than the *Resident Evil* model."

"Onimusha was an expensive game to make. If it had failed, I would have probably had to leave the videogame industry"

Inafune's first producer gig was on *Resident Evil 2*. When he first heard about Shinji Mikami's plan to devise an entirely new genre to take advantage of the PlayStation's 3D capabilities, Inafune was galvanised. At the time, Capcom was more concerned with attempting to refashion its famed beat 'em up series in three dimensions. *Resident Evil* was viewed as a risky venture in comparison, but went on to define Capcom's PlayStation-era output.

"The idea of a horror game was a daring one, and some people at Capcom really didn't have any confidence in *Resident Evil* at all, so it wasn't assigned many resources," Inafune explains. "Of course, as soon as the game came out and started to sell, Capcom changed its view and was able to fund the sequel properly. Even so, there were a lot of problems with the development of *Resident Evil 2*. We were very ambitious because we wanted the second game to show a big improvement. I was brought in as producer because as well as organising the planning schedule, I could work on the art and the promotional material, leaving Shinji Mikami free to work solely on game direction."

Nevertheless, *Onimusha* was a huge personal gamble for Inafune. Capcom was prepared to underwrite his vision, but expected a successful return on its investment. "It was an expensive game to make. If it had failed, I would have probably had to leave the game industry," Inafune explains. "During the final months of development I lost seven kilos. Thankfully my staff were very supportive and they really believed in the potential of the game. In fact, we'd already begun to make plans for *Onimusha 2*, so we convinced ourselves



that the first game would be a success, which helped us to cope with the pressure."

In Inafune's mind, *Onimusha* was always a trilogy: "The defeat of Nobunaga is a long story. I thought we might need three games to tell it." In many ways, *Onimusha 3* seems more similar to the first game than the second, so it's no surprise to learn that while the first and third were made by the same team, *Onimusha 2* was handled by a different group of developers altogether. "*Onimusha 2* was an attempt to highlight different elements of the play, such as character interaction," Inafune begins. "As it turned out the players really just wanted more action, so we returned to that emphasis for the third game. I don't think it was a wasted experiment, but in the future I would keep those more thoughtful gameplay elements away from a series that is renowned for its action. We could use those ideas in a different game."

Much has been made of the decision to stage part of *Onimusha 3* in contemporary Paris as opposed to feudal Japan, with a contrived 'time slip' plot necessary to accommodate this change in scene. With Capcom president Kenzo Tsujimoto admitting in January that increasing the company's market share in the west was now a matter of development policy, *Onimusha 3*'s storyline whiffs of boardroom interference. However, Inafune denies that he came under any internal pressure to mollify western audiences with a more recognisable setting: "If we really wanted to simply appease the biggest audience of all, we would have used an American scenario, but so many games are set there –



Resident Evil, for example. The 'time slip' idea was always part of my thinking. At first it was simply a 'time slip' to the same Japanese location in the modern age but in the end we decided this was not interesting enough. *Onimusha 3*'s Japanese location is Kyoto, which is a very historic city, full of beautiful ancient architecture. So we wanted to find somewhere equivalent in Europe." What about London? Inafune glances out of the window. "Too grey," he smiles. "I visited everywhere – Rome, Milan, Barcelona – but Paris seemed to have the atmosphere I was looking for." Did he really expect players to swallow the 'time slip' stuff? "Put it this way, when you're having fun, logic doesn't come into it."

Despite the game's dramatic change of scenery, some elements of *Onimusha 3* look a little worn out. How does a producer know when to call time on a successful series? After all, *Resident Evil* is still with us, despite a difficult transition period. "*Onimusha* was originally envisaged as a trilogy, but we are thinking about another game," says Inafune. "For commercial reasons we have to consider it. The problem is that it becomes more and more difficult to make sweeping changes to a series. The audience expects a certain level of improvement every time, but at the same time, drastic changes may alienate your core fanbase. You have to find the balance, and this is tough." For Inafune, it is not simply about commercial opportunity versus creative progression, but the need to manage his staff successfully. The same 50 people who slaved away on an adventure game for three years cannot be expected to produce a sequel in less than 12 months. Does he employ 50 new staff just to get the job done? Or does he allow the original team more time to develop their vision? Now that he's in charge of 700 people – Capcom's entire development staff, excepting the recent breakaway Clover Studio – he's determined to imbue them all with renewed purpose.

Togetherness

Inafune's first task was to oversee the centralisation of all Capcom's development studios so that almost everyone works from the same building in Osaka. His aim is to promote the sharing of development tools and technological resources, allowing more time to be lavished on individual creative processes. "Everyone needs space to assert their individuality," he explains by way of inspiration. "Hopefully I can provide that space for all of my staff."

It's rumoured that Inafune is less than happy about the formation of Clover Studio, which has declared independence from the rest of Capcom's R&D department just as he is trying to unite everybody under one roof. Yet, if that's the case, he's being remarkably diplomatic: "Although ultimately my reasoning behind wanting to bring all the production studios together is for greater creative freedom in the long term, there are still obvious restrictions and guidelines to follow. Clover Studio will be a small team, working without any restrictions, apart from the agenda to create games with a completely different mindset."

What about Inafune's own role as the man with the plan? Is it possible now, given the increasingly large team sizes each game requires, that one auteur can stamp their personal vision on a project? "Yes, it's possible, and we have to make it possible. Look at how Mikami has succeeded. I believe there are many like him within Capcom. The talent we have is excellent, wonderful..." Here the translator struggles for more suitable superlatives. "When all 700 staff are moving forward, united toward one aim, then I will be happy. That aim is to create, without any fear." E

"Ultimately, my reasoning behind wanting to bring all the production studios together is for greater creative freedom in the long term"

Keiji Inafune on his latest project, Shadow Of Rome

What appealed to you about the setting of ancient Rome?
When we made *Onimusha*, we used actual events from Japanese history as the basis for our storyline. I hope we were able to tell the world something of our country's past. I'm interested in history, not just Japanese history, and I think that historical events can provide inspiration for videogame storylines. When I was in Europe researching locations for *Onimusha 3*, I was seduced by the rich and varied history of your part of the world. There is so much potential material. But I think that the drama of ancient Rome is a good place to start.

When developing the idea for *Shadow Of Rome*, did the scenario come first, or did you alight on ancient Rome as a good setting for new gameplay ideas to explore?
For every game it's different, but usually the setting comes first, then I work on the gameplay system and the story is sketched in afterwards, which was the case here.

What new gameplay possibilities did the Roman setting suggest to you?
In the *Onimusha* series, your enemies were monsters and demons. However, when human fights human I think it brings more tension to the game, especially if – as with the gladiatorial clashes in ancient Rome – you know it actually happened.

What was the thinking behind dividing the story between two characters: Agrippa the gladiator and Octavius the spy?
If the game was just about the arena-based fighting, there would be no opportunity to tell the story, which I think is an important element. I really wanted to use Roman history in this game so in order to do that we needed a second character to take another role, one that didn't involve fighting but that allows you to see a story develop through his eyes. Most action films have a strong character and a weak character – it's a classic pairing.

How challenging have you found implementing Octavius's stealth sequences?
I have to learn from the best in the genre: *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell*. But it's an interesting task for me to create that kind of tension without modern weapons. You'll see, I think the two characters balance each other very well.

Do you think a game like *Shadow Of Rome* will be pushing PS2 to its limits, or is there still more to come from the current console generation?
I think graphically it's at its limit with the *Onimusha 3* engine. But there are lots of other things we can do to keep pushing games forward before PlayStation3 comes along. We just have to be creative.



Infinite lives

The age of shipping finished games is over. But this isn't an essay on pleasure-crippling bugs, it's about persistent-world titles and how evolution is changing everything...



Unfinished games litter the shelves of every game store in the UK. This is no mistake, no rush to a publisher's deadline: they're meant to be that way. There was a time when patches, code belatedly applied after release, were an irritation, little more than a bug-fixing exercise, inevitable for the deadline-constrained development teams that have been forced to release their games before completion time and again. Now, however, there are dozens of gamers who wait in gleeful anticipation of the latest patch. Developing a game on the fly after release has now become a methodology rather than a stopgap.

The reason for this is one of infrastructure: the net has become so pervasive that it's all too easy for gamers to pick up free content, such as new maps or models, to enhance their games. But there's a more profound change going on, and that's due to the games that exist only because the internet does. These are the persistent worlds – the massively multiplayer games that never cease, but pause only to apply the latest developments in the game's evolution.

The vast sci-fi shooter *PlanetSide*, for example, now plays like a completely different game from that put out to beta test last year. This is because both players and developers (who of course obsessively play their own games) have worked out exactly what they wanted from their online experience. *PlanetSide* may have had an initial concept and framework on release, but the fine detail has only come to pass as many megabytes of patching have systematically changed or tweaked almost every aspect over subsequent months.

But what does this mean for players and developers? An unfinished singleplayer game that was progressively improved over its lifetime simply wouldn't be acceptable, so how does this phenomenon sit with the players who pay monthly subscriptions?

The free lunch

A player's experience of these games is, of course, going to depend on the psychology of the gamer in question. The nature of the PC audience means that

One of *PlanetSide*'s continents, poised to be unleashed on its audience in order to give the game even more durability

online gamers range from a hard core who will play long term, to an army of less committed gamers who will dabble only occasionally in the various experiences online gaming has to offer, never settling long enough to pay for a subscription and not contributing to the process and community of an MMO.

Many players, though, will latch on to a game and its community, and will continue to play that same game for years. This is particularly the case with persistent-world games, in which players see returns for the time they invest with a character that progresses and grows richer and more powerful over time. MMOs cleverly offer things for players to aspire to – magic armour, robot suits, bigger and shinier spaceships – all designed to keep players' attention fixed on the future. A more important factor, however, is that gamers will become attached to the community and their relationships with other people and the game. These will, from release to its dying days, evolve with that family of players. Many gamers will find themselves playing an MMO from the beginning, since the client software is usually free to download and it might even have an open beta testing period in which anyone can play. Developers initially launch a beta to draw in a crowd and get some free testing, as well as hooking some potential subscribers.

It's not mandatory to supply feedback while participating in these games, but players are given plenty of opportunity to do so through forums, bug report forms and, often, in-game messaging systems. Some feedback is inevitable from players who play obsessively, and many will even leave games and return at a later date, checking up on how their title has progressed. Gamers who initially deserted *PlanetSide*, for example, are now returning after problems and contentions have been addressed. These people often return to a quite different game.

The nature of developing on the fly, and adding content to a subscription game, means players will often feel as if they are getting something for free, or at least having something extra to show for paying a regular subscription of around $10 (£6) a month. This is an important factor in both motivating players and defining the developers' approach to the process. All this adds up to a feeling of inclusion which helps to perpetuate players' interest. They want to participate in an exchange of ideas with both fellow players and the development teams who run the game alongside them.

The long haul

Of course, patches applied to these games are still fixing bugs, mountains of them, as **Sigurdur Olafsson** from *Eve Online*'s Icelandic development team, CCP, explains: "*Eve* is played during a period of months, not weeks, so keeping it a fun experience is most challenging. That means bugfixing, content, balancing, content, bugfixing, rebalancing, bugfixing and content. Did I mention bugfixing? You always have to choose between developing new features and content or fixing bugs. Fortunately, we have 30 people working at making *Eve* a better game and we are constantly adding more people as subscriber numbers continue to grow. This helps us keep all fronts moving forward at the same time without losing too much focus."

Eve is one of the most acute examples of the kind of feedback between players and developers we're talking about. One example of this was that in the early stages players discovered a loophole in the game that made mining asteroids far more profitable than the developer had initially anticipated. This changed the entire dynamic of the game, as players set up vast mining operations to feed their starship-buying habits, as Olafsson explains: "In beta, the cans were only thought of as a 'loot drop'. However, the players soon found out that aggregating all the mining in the temporary can and having other players handle the hauling of the mined minerals to the station was much more effective. There are also other aspects of the game where the initial design morphs into something else, and in those cases we try to go with the flow."

But it's more than just accidental discoveries that allow the players to have what they want. "The players have multiple ways of affecting the development of *Eve*," says Olafsson. "For starters, the forums are quite active and we regularly ask for feedback there. Then there is the development weblog where we post announcements about upcoming stuff and get direct feedback before its released. We also have a player volunteer program, where we get tremendous amounts of feedback, especially from the Bug Hunter division, that assist us in testing, balancing and developing new features and fixes. The difference between a community member and a developer tends to get a bit grey sometimes, as a number of people have ended up as members of the development team here in Iceland due to their ideas and ability to provide clear and concise feedback. So, all in all, the *Eve* community has a lot of leverage in altering the game's future."

Sony Online is also pushing some boundaries with its portfolio of online games, which includes *EverQuest* and *PlanetSide*. **Victor Wachter**, the current community manager of *PlanetSide*, talks of the need for a controlled response to player whims, especially within their player-vs-player environment: "*PlanetSide* is a competitive game, and so each faction tends to have its own unique agenda for development. We cannot let the

The nature of developing on the fly means players will often feel as if they are getting something for free



The newcomers

In addition to the established *Eve Online* and *PlanetSide*, there are couple of other forthcoming massively multiplayer games that everyone should take note of. The most significant of these is *World Of Warcraft*, a massively multiplayer title built on the ever-popular fantasy world of Blizzard's *Warcraft* games. (More information can be found here: www.blizzard.com/wow) The second is the enigmatic *There* (to be found at www.there.com). This unusual title claims not to be a game at all, and is playing purely on the social, 3D chatroom nature of online games. It could well be an important turning point for how these games are viewed.

The rise and fall

CCP's **Sigurdur Olafsson** talks about one of the player-driven changes in *Eve Online*: "We hoped there would be large coalitions of corporations, but the alliances in *Eve* went beyond that very quickly. They control large areas of the outer regions and police them very carefully. The wars and the political landscape are constantly changing, and we want to enhance that experience. Today, alliances really can't hurt each other except shooting each others' ships, but with the *Shiva* expansion player owned deployables in space and other additions will increase the 'value' of owning – and protecting – territory."

NVA Claimed Territory
(Restricted) New Verlal Alliance (NVA)
NVA Protectorate Zone
Guristas Pirates
Sisters of EVE
NORTHERN CORRIDOR
Joye Empire
NVA Protectorate Zone
Mordu's Legion
!!!WARNING: HIGH PIRATE THREAT!!!
Lonetrek-Forge Coalition (LFC)
Society of Conscious Thought
Polaris
No Jumpgate Access
WESTERN CORRIDOR
Outer Ring Excavations
Caldari State
Intaki Syndicate
Gallente Federation
InterBus
CONCORD
Minmatar Republic
(Restricted) Fountain Alliance (FA)
Serpentis Corp
Blood Raiders Covent
Ammatar
Amarr Empire
Great Wildlands Alliance (GWA)
Thukker Tribes
Khanid Kingdom
Coalition of Free Stars (CFS)
SOUTHERN CORRIDOR
!!!WARNING: WARZONE!!!
Angel Cartel
Curse Alliance (CA)
CA Protectorate Zone
XIF Protectorate Zone
CFS Protectorate Zone
(Restricted) Stain Alliance (SA)
Sansha's Nation
Xetic & Immensea Federation (XIF)
SA Claimed Territory

community guide us entirely, since any given member represents one third of the playing population at best. We often use community feedback as our first alert to areas to target development for, and use data and our own observations to make final decisions."

Of course, the real aim of both developers and players is to create the game they want to play. "We do this by making sure that we, as developers, are as accessible to our players as we can be," reports Wachter. "Our players know us, and that ensures that they are comfortable giving honest and constructive feedback. We present content updates to them on a regular basis and open up the debate, modifying each design according to their feedback and the issues that they may foresee before we do. We keep them on top of our dev activities on a weekly basis, and always make ourselves available to answer questions, clarify information and even enter debates on the ongoing direction of the game."

The players, Wachter says, have been instrumental in creating the game as it is today. Feedback has

resulted in innovations such as the continental lattice system, which ensures that the base-capture process which dominates *PlanetSide*'s play now operates over a number of fronts. This slows the movement of troops and creates a greater balance in tactics than would be present if this system were not in place. More feedback has continued to refine the system in recent months. Other content has been implemented to broaden the scope of the experience, from new pilotable vehicles to major changes in the way the game is played. This doesn't always accord with players' expectations of course, as Wachter explains: "Everyone has a different definition of content. We have released new game systems more than new items and vehicles. Personally, I consider this to be content, as it adds to the players' overall gameplay experience instead of just fixing outstanding issues. However, our playerbase has called for more tangible content, and so we are designing and will be releasing some updated vehicles and other items along with systems in the future."

The big payoff

Continued online development is already defining how games are approached. Significant examples include the Gollop brothers' *Laser Squad Nemesis*, in which the purity of the *X-Com* games has been reworked as a player-vs-player turn-based combat title. This has seen multiple updates and the careful of introduction of new factions, heavily tested by a core of players before a general release.

Players have even more say in the industry and commerce game *A Tale In The Desert*. The role of gamers in this title is so integral that community members hold forums in which they will vote in-game on new features, community laws or actions that will affect them all. Gamers legislate within their own gamespace – deciding on what they want to be possible within the game's parameters. This is so profound a symbiosis that the players recently indicated that they were happy for the game to restarted – eradicating months of hard work to bring about a game that they had all voted for, and that they will be far happier participating in.

Singleplayer games are receiving online content updates, too: although already discredited as a failure before it's even been properly implemented, Valve's Steam system, which allows players to access huge amounts of additional content for their *Half-Life* games, offers a look at where singleplayer and multiplayer games alike might be heading. As well as having their games automatically patched to the latest version, players will be able to move into an 'on demand' environment where they can either modify their own games by downloading patches and mods for them at the click of a button, or tell developers what they want and see these desires built into an online environment. These content-modification systems can only become more streamlined and discrete over time.

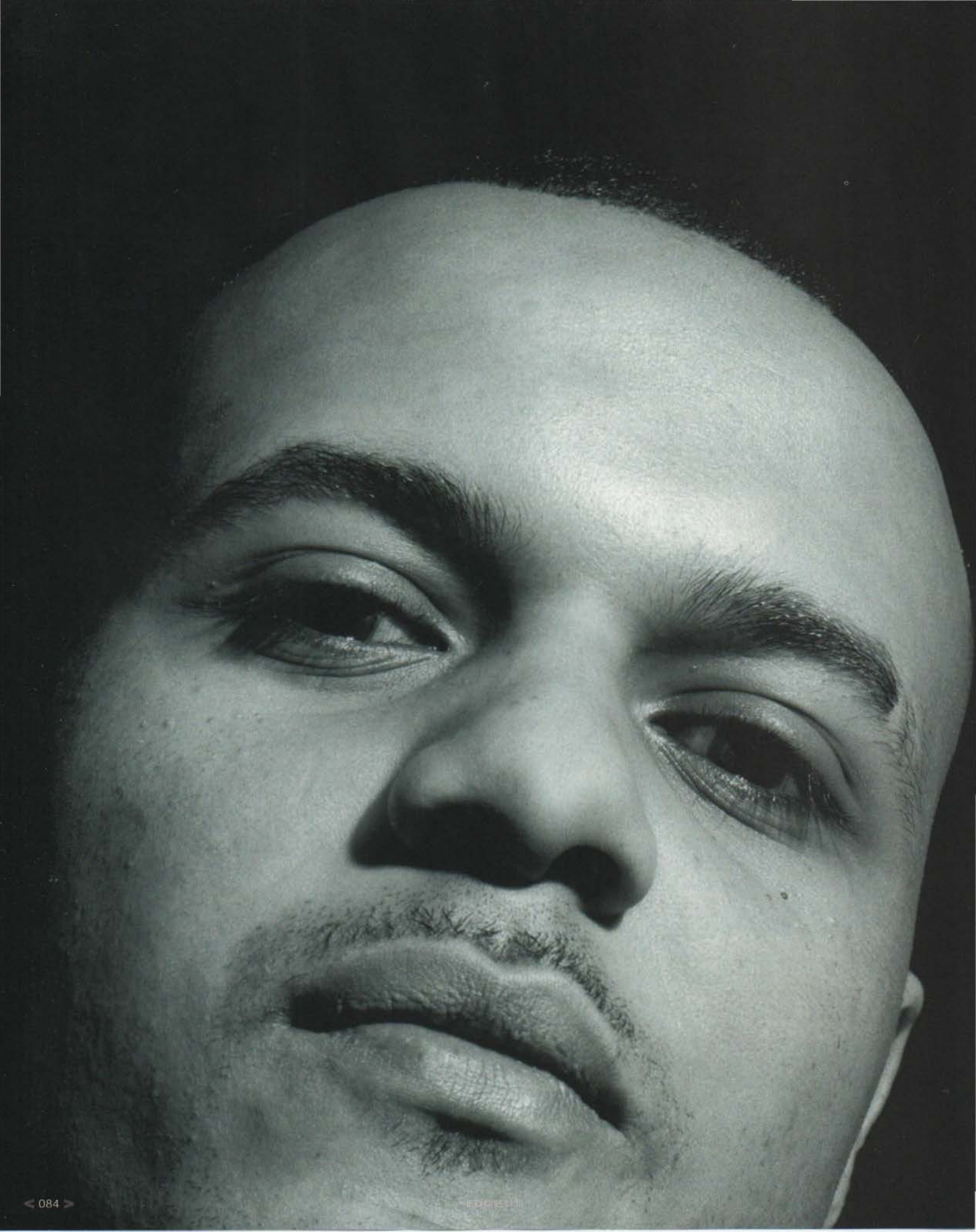
Continued online development is defining how games are approached. Examples include Laser Squad Nemesis

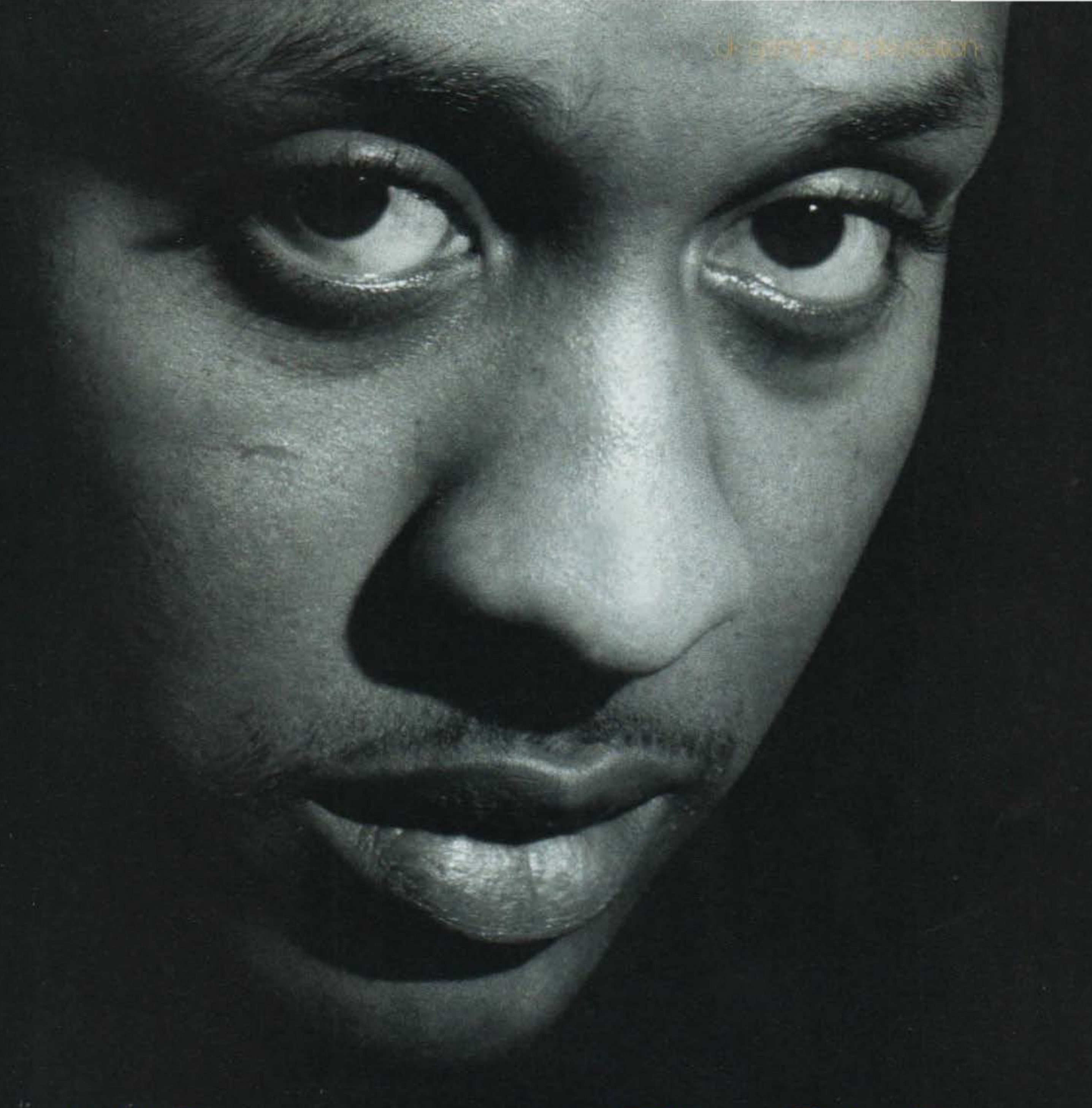
This is a largely PC-based phenomenon for now: the storage capabilities and online access of the average PC make it the perfect platform for this kind of experimentation. But Xbox has already been able to download extra maps for various games, as well as fixing things such as the weapons balance in *Unreal Championship*, storing this information on its hard drive – an otherwise unprecedented event in console gaming. So it will no doubt be interesting to see which of the next-generation consoles take this methodology and use in their future development.

Ultimately, the games mentioned here are raising the benchmark for those that will follow in their footsteps. Two thousand heads are better than one, and as more people contribute to the development of a game, it's more likely the final product will become highly polished. Well, that's the idea, at least – Sid Meier's *Civilization III* might have been developed purely from feedback from players, but it could have done with a few months' testing by players, too. No matter how involved players are in the development process, they're not going to appreciate being expected to play a fundamentally broken game. Wachter has something to say on this subject: "*PlanetSide* had one of the cleanest releases of any MMOG out there. However, to be fair, as the competition in the massively multiplayer market builds, that level of completion will have to become the minimum standard to become successful. We can all think of certain games out there that are solid products today, but will never live down their disastrous release."

Developing on the fly and taking advantage of the industriousness of players can only become a more competitive arena, and the developers who don't provide a slick and responsive service will no doubt fall by the wayside before they ever have a chance to start the ball rolling. This is already being evidenced in the beta testing of Blizzard's *World Of Warcraft*. Players have all remarked that the game already feels like a finished product, months before release. And there's no doubt at all that this level of craftsmanship is going to cause acute problems for its rivals in the months to come. These games might not ever be 'complete' in any orthodox sense, but the level to which they're glitch free and balanced on release will likely determine just how much money is available for that future evolution.







UK garage vs PlayStation

The future of garage music is gritty and lo-fi – and it's coming from your gaming hardware. So how did Sony's PlayStation make its mark on the streets, and what does it mean for bedroom musicians?

For all the goodwill that greeted it, when Codemasters' Music 2000 arrived on the PlayStation at the end of the '90s it was essentially viewed as a primitive console approximation of more complex PC music software like Cubase, Logic or Fruityloops. With the cult of the superstar DJ still holding strong, the tinny preset beats and clipped synths offered on 2000 were surely suitable for only the most amateurish of music dabblers.

What a difference five years makes. Beneath the long shadow of Dizzee Rascal's 2003 Mercury Music Prize-scooping Boy In Da Corner, we've seen a number of aggressively lo-fi UK garage splinter genres – variously called grime, sub-low, dubstep, 8 bar – rise to prominence, each one springing from a dedicated underground based around London suburbs like Hackney and Croydon, and permeating out of the capital to urban conurbations across the UK. These are beats few mainstream record companies will touch: they circulate in the form of white-label 12-inch vinyl sold from small independent record shops,

Grime pays

Making music on the PlayStation production line

1. Load up Music 2000. Choose from a range of preset samples and string them together into bass, drum, and melody riffs – or load up some samples from a CD and chop them into shape.

2. Dispose of any excess samples to minimise the amount of memory used and save the track to memory card.

3. Connect PlayStation to PC with an audio cable. Burn your tune to CD.

4. Now, either:
a) Press CD to dub-plate or white-label in pressing plant, then distribute to shops like Rhythm Division, Independance, Black Market, or Uptown as a DJ tool.



b) Visit a pirate station. "Get the CD to one of the DJs like Slimzee, Target, Karnage, Mac 10 or Rossi B & Luca," reckons Fiddy. "Regardless of who you are and how you made your tune, DJs like these have the power to make or break tunes."

c) Add vocals to it using PC software to make a finished track.

or on pirate frequencies broadcast from transmitters erected high on concrete tower blocks. Commercially, prospects are reasonably slim: "A big tune, you'll be lucky to get two thousand," explains **Eastwood**, a DJ from London's 2 Good 2 B Tru Cru. "The crowd now, they're all young, they're at school – they don't have money to buy loads of records." But the culture is huge, and what's perhaps more

"Every kid you talk to, they make beats. There's so much talent, so much knowledge forcing through"

surprising is that PlayStation appears to have an important role. "Every kid you talk to now, they make beats," says **Dizzee Rascal**. "I would say at least eight out of ten kids. There's so much talent, man, so much knowledge forcing its way through. They talk about the PlayStation generation – that's what they call us, us making our beats on the PlayStation."

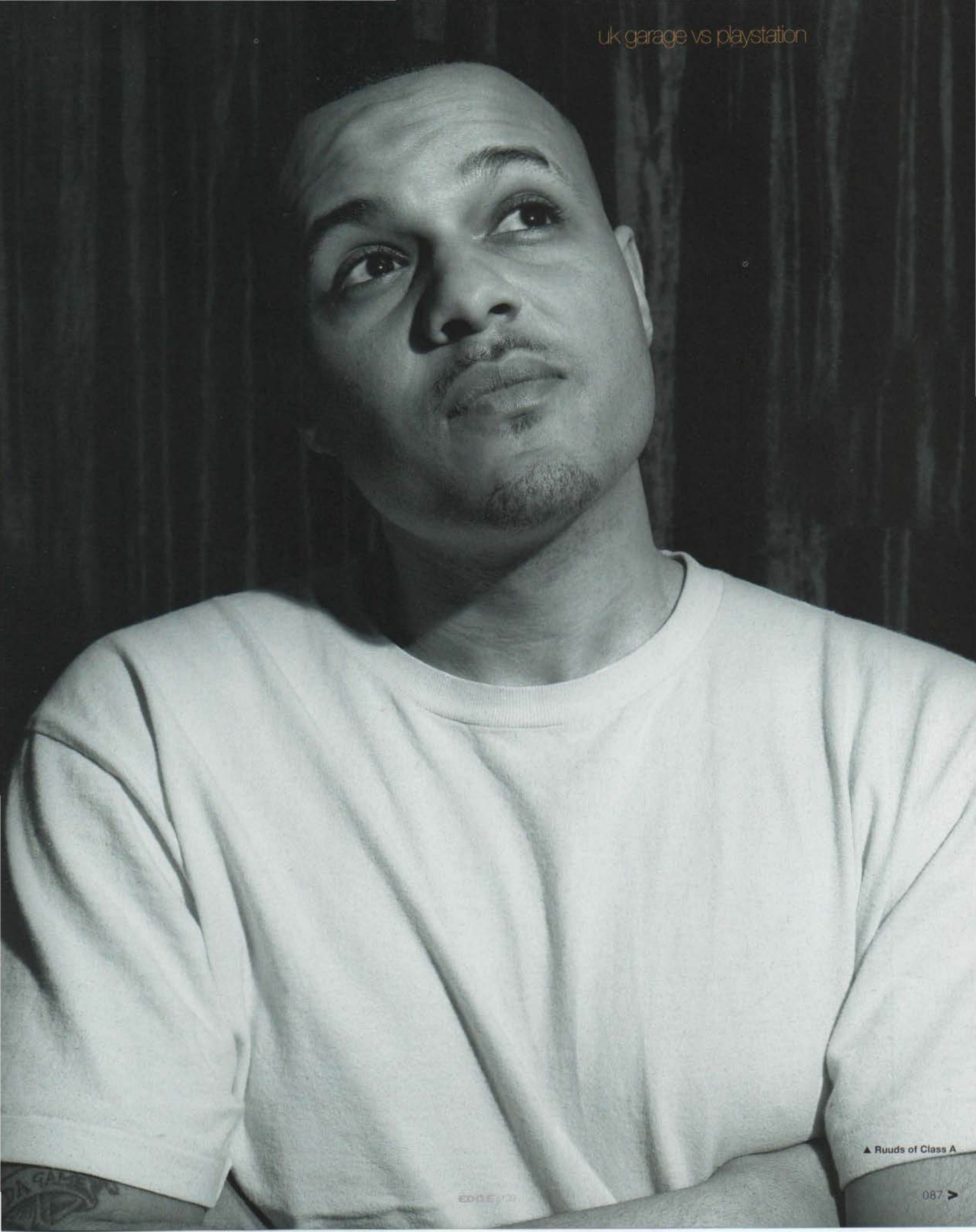
So long as it sounds good

Which isn't to say that UK garage culture has greeted the PlayStation sound with open arms. "Some producers and many of the elders in garage often seemed embarrassed about the PlayStation connotations because it doesn't give the music a professional reputation; many have tried to distance themselves from the scene," says **Chantelle Fiddy**, editor of Deuce magazine, a monthly guide to UK underground street culture. The rumour that Musical Mob's sparse 2002 tune, Pulse X, was made entirely on a PlayStation from preset sounds – an assertion hotly denied by its creators – was clearly meant disrespectfully. Yet ironically, the scene gossip came over as little short of a glowing recommendation to a new generation of gamers alienated by UKG's champagne culture. "Gone are the elitist days where only the big man in his big studio can come through," adds Fiddy. "So long as it sounds good, we don't care."

"I wouldn't say PlayStation is tacky at all," shrugs **Ruuds**, a Leicester-born MC-producer. "It's a realer way to make music. It's for raw artists, ya get me? If you can pick this up and make something sellable with it, that's real talent." He should know: his crew, Class A – which also features MCs DP and Tips – recently scored a deal with Platinum Projects (an imprint of XL, home of Dizzee Rascal, The Prodigy and The White Stripes) on the strength of a demo pieced together on Music 2000. Their sound is classic grime – tense, high-tempo beats accompanied by stabbing instrumentation and jabbered lyrical content that veers between tales about 'slashing nigga's face up like steak sirloin' to the kind of aggression possibly more familiar to your everyday gamer: see They Aint Ready, pitched as 'something new / that'll slam you in the chest like a hurricane punch from Ryu' (the *Street Fighter* protagonist's combat manoeuvre is a hurricane kick, of course, but, hey, *you* tell them that).

The group's full-length album for XL is currently delayed until MC Tips gets out of jail: "Street stuff," explains Ruuds, with a shrug. But it's this group of people – working-class suburban kids with an aspirant edge – that has taken most keenly to Jester's Music series. A PlayStation is reasonably cheap, user-friendly, and portable; the software is easy to find secondhand, simple to get to grips with and perfectly suited to the tinny digital landscape of grime. "In between doing what we was doing – like making loot, trying to hustle and whatever – it was easy to come home, switch it on and put down ideas," explains Ruuds. "I know it like the back of my hand now. The effects are easy to bring up on it, reverb and all that. There is a sampler on it – I've used it to make new sounds and that. But the sounds already in it are good."

What's especially interesting is the way the software has shaped Class A's musical style. "The beat sequencer that's in it, it's made it easier for me to make more complex beats," explains Ruuds, tapping away at a controller. He



▲ Ruuds of Class A



▲ DP of Class A

works quickly, layering several drum riffs to thicken up the percussion and replicating simple bass lines into long, repetitive grooves. Rather than balking at the sound quality, he argues that the synthetic sound of the game is a boon: "It's shaped the way we're writing – the beats are more digi, so it's made us come up with new kinds of flows to fit them. I've done stuff on PC – I've done some of our album on a PC – but it always seems like something's lost. We just keep coming back to this."

The predominance of PlayStation on the grime landscape hasn't been lost on Sony. A new web initiative, Noise Up The Suburbs (www.noiseupthesuburbs.com), was launched late last year to pinpoint the new wave of what Sony calls "the burner generation." Featuring interviews with stars like Dizzee Rascal as well as a forum, a basic online sequencer and a raft of features on things like how to make a bootleg, it's a commendably non-patronising example of corporate internet marketing done

However, this has bestowed importance on London's bulging waveband of pirate radio stations. "Before all the trouble, we were playing out quite a lot," explains Eastwood, "but now it's all about radio. You need to have the people following you, and radio's the best thing. The frequencies are full up." Obviously, sound quality is far from paramount if you're broadcasting over a fuzzy inner-city waveband. And given that the police might raid at any moment – contravening the wireless telegraphy act can mean two years in prison – it's not hard to see why a small slipcase of CD-Rs is preferable to a heavy bag of vinyl.

Naturally, however, the PlayStation has its limitations, and Fiddy is keen to point out that not all grime producers use the console: "Most people start with computer-based software, programs such as EJay. Up from that you'll find producers using Reason and Fruityloops and polishing tools such as T-Racks, and at the top end of the scale, the likes of Wiley will use Logic

The Music series is blurring the boundaries between what a console is and what it could be

right. "The impetus behind the site was to document DIY music culture," explains Sony's **Carl Christopher**. "The re-appropriation of technology has been a key tool in producing some amazing musical hybrids, and the site has enabled us to highlight some of the key exponents of UK DIY music production."

A pro's evolution

DJ Eastwood is a good example of a PlayStation musician made good. A founding member of 2 Good 2 B Tru, one of the fast-rising crews from northwest London, this 24-year-old producer first owned a PlayStation for simple gaming purposes – "Mainly *Pro Evolution*," he grins – but the release of Music 2000 spurred him into making music: "It was my first real experience with a sequencer. The first six months I had it, the tunes weren't really arranged properly. But over six months, I started working on the layouts, listened to a lot of other tunes and came up with some of my own ideas. Figured out how all the bars work. All the terminologies, like reverb and stuff that I wouldn't have understood before – it helps you figure out what all that means. Now I can sit down and figure out pretty much any program."

The PlayStation's popularity may also have something to do with the fractured nature of modern UK garage clubland. Violence at popular nightspots like scene lynchpin Wiley's Eskimo Dance have made nights a distinct rarity. This is no real problem to the PlayStation producers: few tunes really boast the sound quality to play in front of a live crowd, anyway.

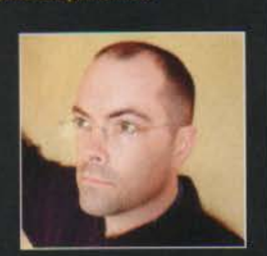
and Cubase." An important issue when choosing program and platform is undoubtedly memory. "If you're making a more complex track, you'll be using four or five slots," explains Ruuds. The 20 or so memory cards that litter his carpet confirm that, if you're planning a back catalogue, Sony's PlayStation is a money-pit.

Still, let's not deny it: here lies the seed of a console revolution. For arguably the first time, the Music series has succeeded in blurring the boundaries between what a console is and what it could be. If you want to get Marxist for a second, this is all about working-class youth taking control of the means of production, taking a gaming machine and making it into a functional mini-studio. All the scene needs now is for the developers to catch up: while impressively complex, last year's Music 3000 didn't prove the holy grail the scene was waiting for. "I tried 3000, but I couldn't get to grips with it," Eastwood attests. "It seemed good – there were loads of little things on there – but I didn't have the patience." Class A's Ruuds concurs: "I've used 3000, but I like 2000 better. 3000 just doesn't have the same feel. You have to keep coming out of menus, the mic it comes with is really shit – it's just not as easy to use."

Ever the entrepreneur, Ruuds has an idea. "What we really need to do is talk to the guy who makes the game. I've got loads of ideas for the follow-up – it'll be a best-seller." What is the future for console music making? It's hard to say, but right now the software is in safe hands. Perhaps it's time for the developer to join the upstarts at street level.

Q&A: Tim Wright

The man behind Music 2000 on grime and punishment



Who did you imagine Music's main audience would be?
When I was at school there was one guy who had a four-track tape recorder. He was God. One day, I managed to get hold of it and put some music together. The next day I had to give it back, and I was devastated.

Even with advances in technology, there is still a big gap in multitrack recording and sequencing for kids. Most teenagers don't have access to a studio, or even a PC with enough poke to run any kind of sequencer. And even then you've got to pay a fortune for music software, so I was aiming this squarely at the kids who had a PlayStation and were desperate to get into composing or mixing their own tunes.

The surprise for me was that it wasn't just the kids who bought Music – there were blokes in their 50s buying PlayStations just to use the software. Basically, people who'd been in bands in their younger days who wanted to get back into music writing, but who didn't want to shell out too much. I've had some fairly crazy fans, too. One guy dyed his pubic hair purple and danced naked to his tracks in front of record company offices, trying to get a deal. As I recall, the tunes weren't that bad.

Are you surprised to hear that people are making releasable tracks on Music 2000?
To be honest I'm not surprised at all... Music 2000 is chock full of samples and has such control over how notes are played and blended that it's more than possible to create really convincing tracks.

I know that famous dance acts have used Music and Music 2000 to create loops, and one guy uses it as a drum machine while he plays guitar over it. Some Music users have managed to get recording contracts from their demos, which was actually the main driving force behind my designing it in the first place.

I receive demo CDs on a regular basis, ranging from awful to excellent. On one occasion I was so impressed by a CD that I requested the memory card just to make sure it was genuine.

It all came full circle when Jester employed a guy called Nick Pendriis as their in-house musician, purely on the strength of his Music 2000 tracks.

Many PlayStation musicians say they preferred Music 2000 to the sequel. What are your thoughts?
Progress is all about evolution. As a team we were always very brave with each iteration of the product, and tried to push the boundaries as far as the hardware and the user interface is concerned.

One die-hard Music 2000 fan did contact me after buying MTV Music Generator 2 and said he wanted his money back as the new pointer interface was 'horrendous'. I told him to stick with it for a couple of days, then phone me back, and if he was still unhappy I would refund him.

He phoned back at the end of the week and said that after the initial shock, he was now very happy. In fact he'd used Music 2000 a couple of times in that week and had missed some of the features available on the new version. As a matter of fact, out of all the versions created it has to be said my all-time favourite is probably MTVMG2, which I still use occasionally for getting ideas down.

But you can never please all the people all the time. It's always a risk trying to take a well-received brand forward in such dramatic ways. Every product did get around the 9/10 mark from the official press, so Music has had a good run.

Have you any plans for a follow-up to the series?
I left Jester Interactive on July 31 last year (which also happens to be my birthday) to set up www.tantrumedia.com

As far as Jester creating any more Music products, that's really in their hands now, as they own the brand.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Full Spectrum Warrior

(PC, Xbox) THQ

'Authentic' mode changes everything you thought you knew about playing *FSW*. Stressful, frustrating and randomly cruel, it's wonderful stuff. To the wall!



Metroid: Zero Mission

(GBA) Nintendo

Oh, *that* twist. Never before has such a short game taken so long to finish, but the unexpected nature of the ending section is worth a hundred false starts



Ridge Racer V

(PS2) Namco

Anticipation of the PSP update saw part five being dusted off this month. It may be a lightweight, but its cityscapes retain that cool, crisp Namco vibe.



The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

(PC, Xbox) Ubisoft

It might not be a walk in the park, but how could you dislike a game in which screaming wizards fall from the sky and witches paralyse barbarians in their pants?



What's in a name?

And, more to the point, what's in a price?

Alongside the boxes of *Driver 3* in your local game store you may have seen something else in the last few weeks: Atari's 'Invasion'. This deal gives you a free T-shirt with every Atari game bought, and it's a clear demonstration of the idea behind Infogrames' decision to buy the legendary name. Atari says 'videogames' the way only a few other words in the world do, certainly more so than a rainbow-coloured armadillo ever did.

It was a step many diehard Atari fans found hard to swallow – the wholesale appropriation of 30 years of history, transplanted across an ocean to a development house which had characteristically exhibited a very different approach to gaming and its industry. Infogrames chose Atari to add weight to its brand, to make an overt promise that it ate, breathed and slept gaming the way its fans did. And then last year it released *Enter The Matrix* and this year *Driver 3* (below).

Atari's chairman has made it abundantly clear that he thinks sales are more important than quality. Enraged at Warner Brothers' scheme to fine publishers who use its IP to make games with a review average of less than 70 per cent, he exploded. *ETM* didn't make the 70 per cent cut, but it did sell four million copies. And in Atari chief Bruno Bonnell's mind, that's what Warner should care about.

But Warner, it seems, has a sounder grasp of protecting its name than Bonnell. *Driver 3* will sell very well, and to people with high expectations. Some of them will also walk out of the shop with an Atari T-shirt under their arm. And when they get home, it will be to a game that is unfinished and broken. It has one-way walls which let enemy bullets through but not yours. It has motorcycles that drive off on their own. It will clip you through walls into areas you can't escape from, forcing you to reset the game or wait for Tanner to die of starvation. By the evening, the game will be taking advantage of Game's ten-day return policy, and the T-shirt will be in the bin.

Driver 3 has an RRP of £45. Atari wants you to believe that this is its definition of a premium product. Is the firm saying this is 12.5 per cent better than anything else on the shelves, when in fact it's less of a game than a dozen randomly picked titles? And just who's going to want the Atari name by the time it's finished with it?













Silent Hill 4: The Room

Format: **PC, PS2 (version tested), Xbox** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), September 2004 (US, UK)**





While the grinding, nerve-scraping incidental industrial tunes are absent, breathy ballads and melancholy beats are in abundance





There's a wealth of melee weaponry to be found, some being equippable to secondary characters to allow them to defend themselve There's even a complete set of golf clubs to be pieced together throughout the game

The fog, it seems, has finally lifted, but with good reason. *Silent Hill 4* opens not in the titular hellmouth itself, but in a block of apartments in the neighbouring town of South Ashfield. Tenant Henry Townshend is trapped in his room, a mesh of chains barring his front door, with no way out bar a spiral of waking nightmares experienced via the ominously expanding portal in his bathroom wall.

Henry himself is another departure for the series, too; he has no personal demons to flay, no history that brings him adroitly to the town. This is The Silent Hill Of The Lambs, a demonic serial killer yarn done beautifully.

> The clanking instrumentals are gone. There are no bosses. There's not a single jumpy fright in the entire game. The pressure, it seems, is off



Peeking through your peephole allows you an agonising glimpse of day-to-day goings on outside your stifling prison

There are many other departures in *The Room*, too. Gone are the 'alternative' versions of each location, as each world remains a self-contained spin on the typical *Silent Hill* location – a subway, a prison, a hospital – all unsettling and warped from the off. The disconcerting sonar of hiss from a pocket radio as enemies approach is gone. The clanking, thudding, shrieking industrial instrumentals are gone. There are no bosses. There's not a single jumpy fright in the entire game. The pressure, it seems, is off.

As well as subtractions, there are additions: Henry roams his hub of an apartment in firstperson, an ingenious touch which hammers home the suffocating, stranded nature of his position like nothing else. Being able to glance out of the window at a busy town where nothing is perceptibly awry, or through the peephole of your front door as other tenants get curious, crafts a sense of isolation above and beyond any murky backdrop of thick fog.

Henry also meets a new type of enemy beyond those usually encountered in *Silent Hill* games – the 'sprit'. These floating, glitching apparitions are an entirely new threat, one that can only be stalled but never defeated. They ooze out of the wall, tearing free of thick strands of melted darkness, bringing with them a groaning whine, a fizzing static that clouds the screen and thunderous flashes of blood-red headache. In the second half of the game, as their true nature is revealed, they become some of the most macabre enemies the series has yet seen, borrowing elements from recent Japanese horror movie highlights such as Ring and Ju-On: The Grudge, and then some.

Still, not *that* much has changed; these ghosts are no less vulnerable to the *Silent Hill* slalom of simply running through areas instead of bothering with the hassle of engaging with enemies. The inflexible camera and sticky controls are still ponderous and unforgivably bad at times, with the player just as likely to be murdered by a blind spot than by the greasy, bleeding lumps of burping, gurgling flesh that wander the corridors. Things have been improved, sure – the camera can be flicked behind Henry's head within most of the game's areas, while the right stick gives you a slight pan of the view in any direction. And the combat, thanks to a dodge move and some generously ranged melee weapons, is fractionally less of a

Previously in E133



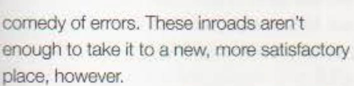








Along with the Water Prison, the obligatory hospital visit is a highlight; empty, possessed wheelchairs scour the corridors at speed, while each of the dozen or so rooms has a gory story. Or just a massive, terrifying face



comedy of errors. These inroads aren't enough to take it to a new, more satisfactory place, however.

The first half of the game is enjoyable despite this, with each successive world feeling all the more grotesquely inventive and disjointed, the Rubik's cylinder of the Water Tower Prison being a highlight. It's the second half of the game, however, that's the weakest; it's a bluntly dull trudge of a revisit to all of *The Room*'s earlier worlds, with the next drip of plot revelation being your only compensation for some tortuous inventory management and having to play guide dog for a clumsy NPC. It does, however, set up what is one of the most powerful, imaginative and consuming final stretches of any *Silent Hill* game yet. Crackling filters, pulsating wall textures, hellish architecture and some typically grotty-but-stunning character models give the visuals some haunting contours; the layers of soundcraft and imagery, unmatched by any movie, give the game an indelible, phlegm-thick atmosphere.

Despite the dislocated pacing of the game's framework, and the frustration of the latter stages of the game, this is still *Silent Hill*, even down to the overly loud footsteps of the lead character, or the rotting totty of the leading ladies of the series; Henry's neighbour Eileen McGalvin, for example, is a magnificently perverse visual mix of sexuality and decay. It's still one of the most jarringly intelligent and stupid videogames yet made. The fuzzy plot leaves players to fill in the gaps with their own hungry imaginations, sparked by the unmatched imagery and strength of character on show. With *The Room*, the series remains as much of an inkblot as ever. Look at it one way, and it's a choking journey with unprecedented attention to unease and psychological horror, a game framed with unparalleled sophistication. From another angle, it's just a clunky PSone throwback, with all the design wit of a dodo.

What do you see?

Edge rating: Six out of ten

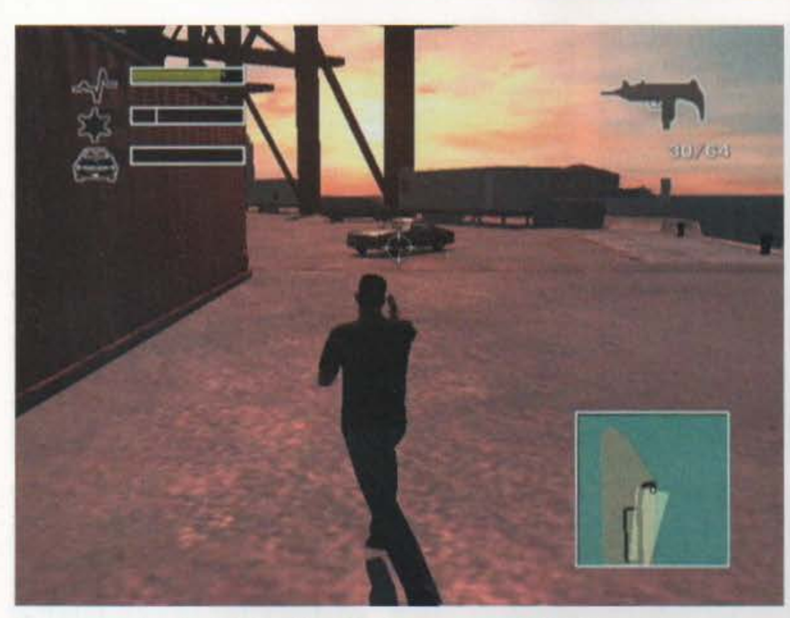


Im-portent

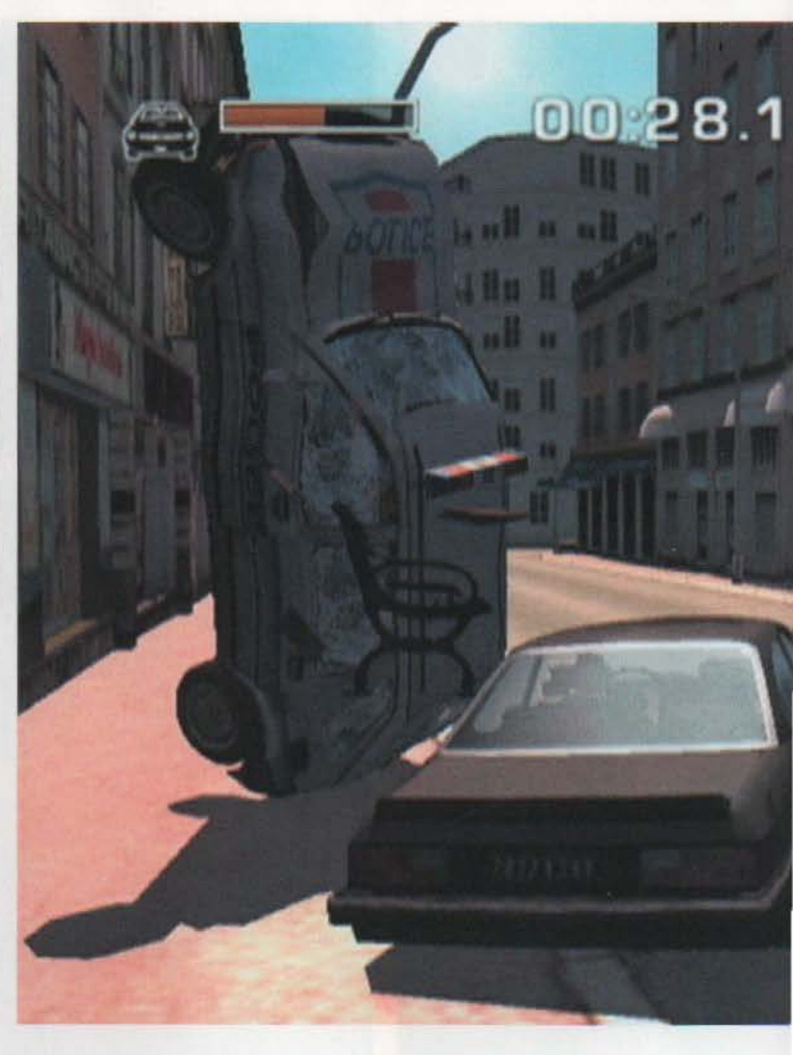
Silent Hill 4 is fully playable as a Japanese import, featuring English text and dialogue, as well as an option to switch the select/cancel functionality of the Cross and Circle buttons on the DualShock pad to the accepted western standard. The Japanese version comes bundled with a music CD, albeit containing just one 16-minute long rendition of the Room Of Angels theme tune.

Driver 3

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox (version tested)** Publisher: **Atari** Developer: **Reflections** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**



Setting up grand crashes is hard work in a city of sparse, cautious traffic. When you do trigger a four-car pile-up, expect to see the frame rate plummet to single figures, marring your Gameclips







Free drive mode and *Driver*'s trademark chase, flee and survive missions suffer from the same poor handling and empty, bland cities that weaken the main game

Usually, describing games with words is difficult. With *Driver 3*, it's easy. So easy, in fact, you need only one: shoddy. This is a poor game – ill-conceived, old-fashioned and abysmally executed. The allure of the basic *Driver* premise remains: you step into the shoes of every steel-eyed wheelman ever to take to the screen. Scream away from a gaggle of police cars, up the steps of a mall, through a crazy assault course in hot pursuit of a gangster with an exotic animal for a nickname, do a drive-by and shoot your way out of a hotel. At a time when gamers are unusually captivated by cars and guns, *Driver* knows it's sitting on a gilt-edged premise.

That premise is all you're buying here, however. *Driver 3*'s flaws are genuinely too numerous to list, but here's a sprinkling to give you the idea. Despite the good looks of the environments, there's no danger at any point of your feet connecting with the ground. The world of *Driver 3* is constructed from a strange amalgam of sponge and glass, allowing you to sink into and skate over any structure or surface. The animation is dreadful, both for you and the scarecrow enemies you face, although their clumsiness is a perfect foil for their straw-headed stupidity. There's no AI here, bar random ducking. Enemies will stand motionless under a hail of bullets until you wander into their prompt zone before blindly proceeding wherever their script instructs them.

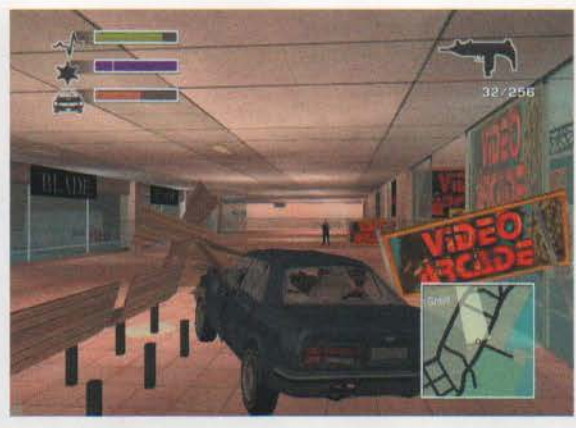
To be honest, this is something of a bonus, since you'll be repeating missions over and over until you've memorised their sequences. The gameplay is so channelled there's no flexibility which would allow you to fix your mistakes. Drop behind a car you're tailing and the game will fail you if you try to take a shortcut to catch up. The physics engine is so preposterous and unpredictable that you'll frequently fail because a bump sends your car somersaulting into a river – and the game doesn't know how to get you out. When you've learned your manoeuvres perfectly, all too often the game will throw a glitch or a massive unfairness your way, either out of cruelty or incompetence.

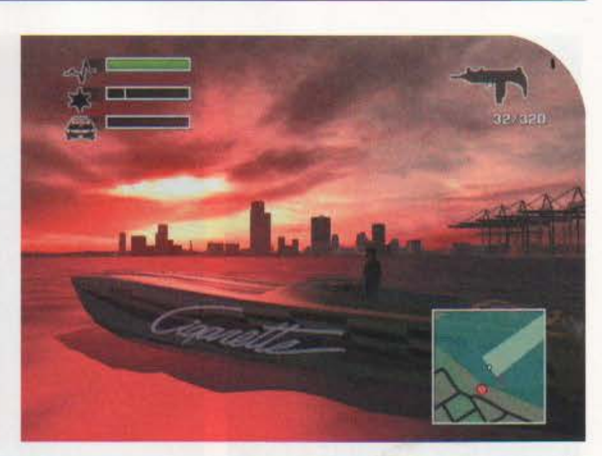
So many basics are missing or fudged it feels like Reflections has blanked out the last five years of gaming development. You can't save checkpoints, so you'll be unable to switch the machine off until you finish a complete mission. Despite the fact that you're supposed to be running and gunning with some kind of skill, doors can only be opened by running straight into them (no one is asking this to be *Splinter Cell*, but it's hard to feel like Michael Madsen when you have to blunder into every room like it's your own

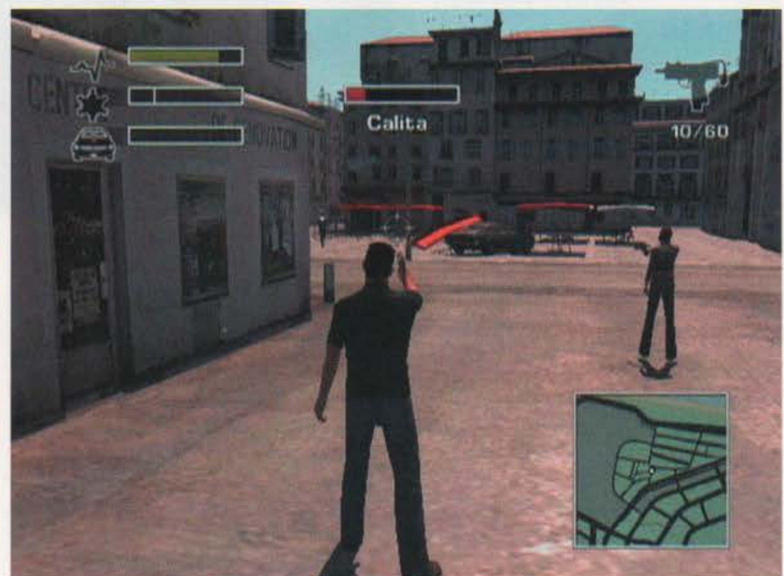
The world of Driver 3 is constructed from a strange amalgam of sponge and glass, allowing you to sink into and skate over any surface

Previously in E120, E135



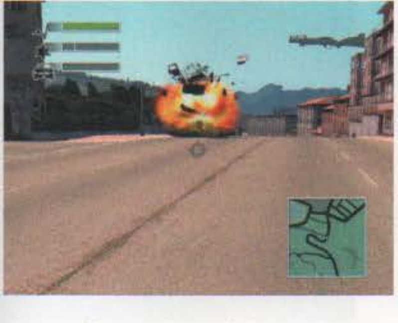








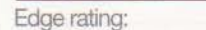
Firstperson mode is available both in car and on foot, and it's the only way you can hope to wring any sensation of speed from the game



surprise party). Press 'action' against a ladder in the water, and instead of climbing it you will teleport into a speedboat 15 feet away. All this before you get to the amusing glitches like random corpses that fall from the sky, and the fatal glitches like missions broken by crucial NPCs not noticing that their faulty pathfinding has caused them to fling themselves into a river mid-conversation.

Moving and shooting actions are some of the worst of any mainstream game this generation. The weapon choice is satisfying enough, but manoeuvring and aiming are so clumsy as to be an insult to the Xbox's analogue sticks. And if shooting isn't any fun, driving is even more disappointing, proving vague and samey. Despite ambitious efforts to accurately replicate and then inaccurately loosen each vehicle's handling, the results are flaccid. What *Driver* needs are cars that let you drive like you're in the movies. Isn't that the hook? Cars with back ends that want to swing wide almost as much as they want to snap into place when you lean on the power. This may be the 'authentic' rolling suspension of American cars, but the flabby handling means the cars you drive simply aren't any fun to throw around. In the end, free drive missions feel more like commuting. There's no incentive to speed, no bonuses for stunts, no sense that there are any hidden delights worth a back alley detour.

The most frustrating facet of *Driver 3* is that good work has gone into it. The cities are impressively and airily recreated, and the music works perfectly to enhance the movie atmosphere. The cut-scenes, on which the game relies heavily, range from the clunkily adequate to the genuinely impressive. Most frustratingly, the mission design – if not their structure – is varied and imaginative; destruction derby assault courses, daring bridge jumps and container-port gunplay sections are spliced in between the chase-then-flee-then-chase dynamic the first *Driver* fundamentally invented. This game did not need to be a bad one: the premise remains ripe with extraordinary possibilities. This, however, simply squanders them, showing a determination to prioritise style over substance which cripples the game and damages gaming as a whole.



Edge rating: Three out of ten



That sinking feeling

The main game is far from all *Driver 3* offers, of course. The intuitively presented Film Director mode allows you to place and time the camera positions on any of your best stunts. You can then upload them to Xbox Live. Tellingly, the most popular downloads are already those clips dedicated to exploiting the game's general fragility, as dgorday's 'hiding in a swimming pool' epic demonstrates.

ShellShock: Nam '67

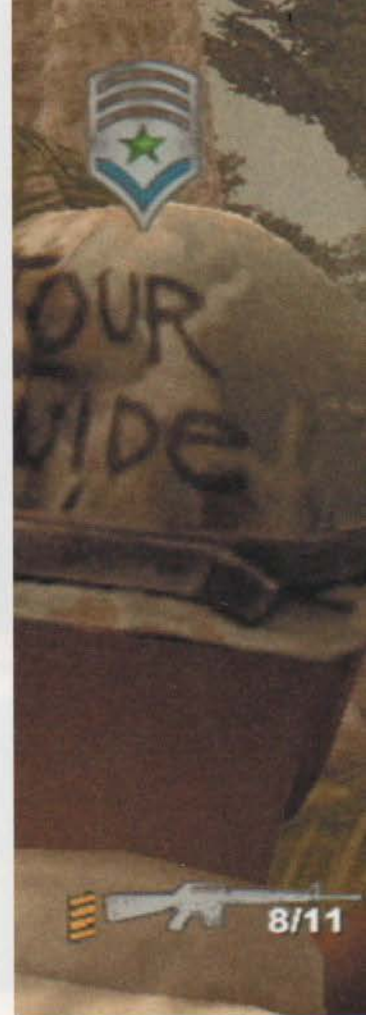
Format: **PC, PS2 (version tested), Xbox** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Guerrilla** Price: **£40 (PS2, Xbox), £30 (PC)** Release: **September**





While the game unflinchingly depicts violence towards women, sex is portrayed off-screen with all the elegance of a Carry On movie





This was going to be the Vietnam game that tells it like it was. A design goal so nakedly ambitious deserved the benefit of the doubt; the doubt being that not just Guerrilla, but the videogame as a medium, could muster the profundity to document that moment in time. What has been produced suggests we still have a long way to go.

ShellShock's Vietnam is as harrowingly realistic as *The Getaway*'s depiction of the London underworld: a string of telegraphed clichés delivered with the sensitivity of a carpet-bombing campaign, never attaining the moral no-man's-land Guerrilla claimed for the game's vision. Even the developer's attempt to show the US and VC in an equally unflattering light, through cut-scenes that jab at the most obvious buttons, serve only to ensure you will feel little sympathy for any member of your platoon.

Not that they require it, as your squadmates are immortal until the moment of their unalterably predetermined demise. Firefights become more surreal than menacing when the worst-case scenario is of your fellow GIs having to catch their breath for a few seconds after being riddled with bullets. There's no sense of responsibility to protect them, and given their erratic combat abilities – seesawing between complete ineffectuality and practically finishing levels for you – the most useful purpose they serve is to draw enemy fire. It's hardly a bonding experience, making the storyline's attempts to wring pathos out of the eventual casualties even more misguided.

Far from being part of the gang, you're practically on a different tour of duty. Fall behind, or get pinned down, and any rescue will be entirely accidental for all the solidarity the platoon displays. The only real indication they're aware of your presence at all comes later in the game, when they doggedly follow you rather than scripted paths ("Follow me!" bellows your CO after receiving urgent directives, then remains uncomfortably still until you take the lead, regardless of whether it's in the right direction). On the alarmingly frequent occasions your squadmates become rooted to the spot at a reloaded checkpoint, you may be tempted to rough the rest of the level out without them.

Either way, being the all-too-mortal Achilles' heel in a troop of supermen weighs heavily against you when you clash with the enemy. The Viet Cong's edge is never that they're fighting intelligently, only that there's more of them than you. This arguably goes with the territory, but makes confrontations a frustrating grind instead of being anxious and unpredictable. While smartly placed snipers and opportunist attackers enliven the set-piece battles, the game's standby is constant mob rushes – in many cases literally constant until a script switch is perceptibly flicked to end it. It doesn't suggest war is hell, just that war is a videogame of generous continues and high-score bodycounts.

If that climbdown from the unflinching portrayal promised by *ShellShock*'s manifesto is the injury, the insult is that it's a mess of a videogame. It's all too easy to overshoot the clockwork pacing of scripted events, leaving you with an awkward wait for the game to



The jungle is convincing, but visibly sprouts as if growing in time-lapse

Firefights become more surreal than menacing when the worst-case scenario is of GIs having to catch their breath after being riddled with bullets

Vib Ripple

Previously in E134, E138











Initially, jungle ambushes are as bewildering and terrifying as you'd expect, but the mechanical AI soon deflates the atmosphere

catch up. Or be tripped up, if you charitably stand in front of the spring-loaded boobytrap placed to kill a fellow GI, freezing progress until trap and man make their intended connection. Missions dutifully tick every box from manning gun emplacements to stealth, but with little confidence or forethought, resulting in an experience fraught with unfair death. The sensation of being neither balanced nor playtested with any consideration pervades the game more than morning mist roiling across the paddy fields.

That's no small feat: the mist is perfectly realised, as are most of *ShellShock*'s environmental effects. Though there's a lack of urgency to character animation, particularly amongst the VC, the abrupt end of that animation in the killing moment is believably sober, as bodies slump against walls or recoil in morbidly graceful cartwheels. Sound design is uniformly great, from the deafening twilight chorus to the vicious, echoing bark of a distant sniper. All the framework to support the original vision is in place, but too often all that's visible is the framework – like your expansive base camp, a downtime area reduced to an irrelevant exercise in walking up to NPCs and triggering their line of dialogue.

ShellShock is a victim of friendly fire, with every moment of connection sabotaged by clumsy design. It's crawling on your belly through the jungle hell, ears ringing with the homicidal fizz of automatic rounds scything into the mud, only for your squad to moonwalk over you into the fray spouting idiot soundbites. Or the truly heart-in-mouth extended running gunfight of the final mission, each inch of ground reclaimed so mortal and so meaningful, that ends in the absurdity of a super-powered, circle-strafing boss straight out of *Wolfenstein 3D*. And it should have been better. Could have been better, perhaps, given a little more time and a lot more care.

As it stands, *ShellShock*'s only claim to being an authentic Vietnam experience is that, once over, it's perfectly capable of serving up traumatic flashbacks.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Guerrilla's warfare

There's an obvious, but not necessarily fair, conclusion to draw about *Killzone* now that Guerrilla's track record has moved from unproven to underwhelming. But though the technology has been shared, the two teams are independent. It's obvious that *ShellShock* needed more development time and critical appraisal, and *Killzone*'s profile has assured it no shortage of either. It still has the potential to be a far superior portrayal of the stark savagery of ground combat, and to translate that theme into a more rewarding game.

Vib Ripple

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **NanaOn-Sha** Price: **¥5,800 (£30)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**136









It can be hard to see Vibri as she stretches the pictures down. It means, for the first time, she needs a secondary gauge (on the right) to keep track of her evolutionary status



Petamorphosis

The point of the Petas is that, once free, they can be applied to your photos like tiny animated stickers. A simple interface allows you to scale and skew each one, adding cheering broccoli and winking frogs in inappropriate places. Completing the collection is compulsive, and since rarer Petas are only found in uploaded photos, you'll find yourself taking them with colours that match the Petas you're missing.



To maximise your score you'll need to set up combo chains. Although you need to bounce on the spot to reveal a Peta, once it's visible you can move to an adjacent area and start revealing another

Where *Vib Ribbon* turned your music collection into a twisting thread of rhythm-action and *Mojibribon* curled your words into perfectly inked raps, *Vib Ripple* takes your photographs and turns them into trampolines. By plugging in a compatible camera (most Sony models and a handful of Canons and Casios, but not an EyeToy) you can upload your photos into the game. Each forms a boinging platform, and the game hides creatures – Peta Characters – in areas that match their colour. Then it's up to Vibri to bounce them free within the time limit.

The game gives you a shopping list of Petas for each photo and you'll have to guide Vibri to promising areas of the picture that match in scale and colour the Peta you're looking for. By timing your bounces you can loosen a Peta from the canvas; bounce long enough and hard enough and it will come free. Enemies patrol the canvas, and Vibri must avoid them or she'll devolve back to a frog and a tadpole and, eventually, game over. Some areas don't hide any Petas at all, and some hide enemies not goodies. Fortunately, Vibri has a secret skill: freeing Petas helps her evolve, and at her most powerful she can stomp on enemies' heads and see exactly where Petas are hidden.

There are several dozen pictures included with the game, and these become harder by becoming subtler. Plain primary colours give way to muted landscapes, and it's far harder to find one specific orange Peta in a close-up of an autumn tree than in a bowl of otherwise blue and green jellybeans. As the levels get harder, the game's weaknesses become more cruelly revealed. Colour matching is a little erratic – sometimes you'll need to head for something brown when the game is asking for a pink. Vibri's super-evolved powers also unbalance a system that worked so well in the previous games: now there's little point in being anything else. Each picture level is identical each time you play – same Peta shopping list, same enemies, same hiding places – and this leads to victory soon becoming entirely dependent on repeated trial and error. It's this, more than anything, which reveals the game to be essentially boring.

Vibri's charm remains irrepressible, but *Ripple* feels compromised and rushed in a way she is not accustomed to. Not that she seems to mind, as she bounds and flips to pull ice creams from your aunt's nose and love hearts from your dartboard.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Future Tactics: The Uprising

Format: **GC (version tested)** Publisher: **Crave (US) JoWood (UK)** Developer: **Zed Two** Price: **$20 (£12)** Release: **Out now (US) August 27 (UK)**

Previously in **E**111, **E**127

It's been a long and no doubt gruelling road from conception to *Pillage* to *Future Tactics*, with the gloomy footnote that Zed Two closed before its game reached the shelves. In the sense that the game fulfils its intent – to prune that most spiky of genres, the strategy RPG, into something manageable, intuitive and bright – it was worth the uncertain wait.

It was evident from our first preview that stripping away the clutter and complication of movement grids, action points and rules within rules was an engaging design, and that hasn't changed. Even when you've become accustomed to your freedoms you'll send characters bounding across the landscape just because they can: scrambling up cliffs, leaping walls, surveying the battlefield from every rooftop, treetop and outcrop. What can't be traversed can be flattened, with the shortest path to any destination only a terrain-gouging explosion away. Your enemies, sadly, give the sensation of having two-dimensional brains never quite able to comprehend such a changing 3D world.

But what frustrates is that the care taken in reworking the mechanics isn't so evident in addressing other genre throwbacks. The initial difficulty curve is as mountainous as the most hard-bitten SRPG, with a single tactical error often enough to lose you a character and forfeit the mission. Bizarrely, an early plot development (though not early enough for newcomers) lifts this sudden-death threat, and difficulty evaporates – with any mission inevitably conquerable in a last-character-standing grudge match rather than requiring the player to build on hard-won experience.

Multiplayer sorely misses its potential, offering such limited numbers – two teams of two – that no amount of unlockable modifiers can enliven it beyond a deathmatch writ slow. Slower still when you're waiting for the other player to calibrate their target reticule over your head. Multiplayer could have been the highlight, so it's a shame more thought seems to have gone into the criteria for unlocking options than the mode itself.

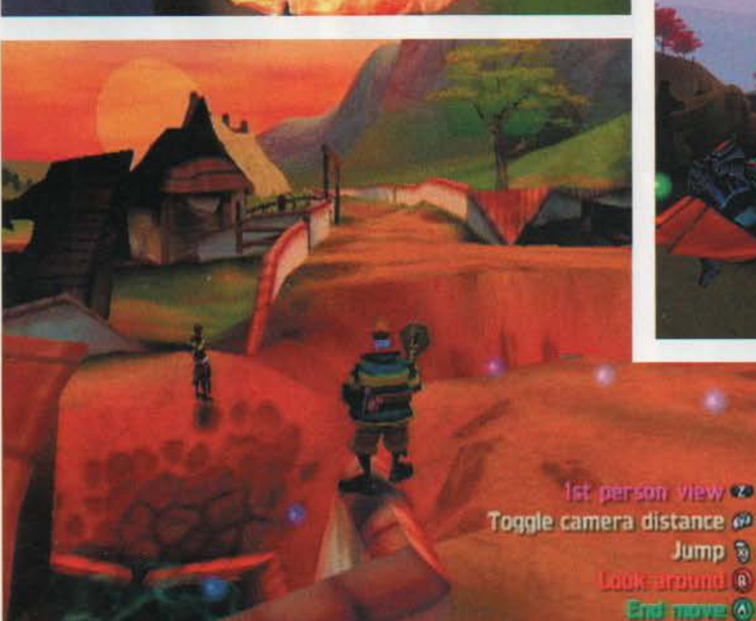
As an example of unabashed, often exuberant Britsoft that pulls out the SRPG's staples and rebinds it in approachable ease, *Future Tactics* is remarkable, deserving of cult success. As a game intended for a wider reception it falls short – not so far as to undo all its good work, but enough to make what should have been a rallying cry just another voice in the crowd.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

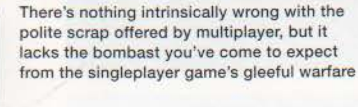












There's nothing intrinsically wrong with the polite scrap offered by multiplayer, but it lacks the bombast you've come to expect from the singleplayer game's gleeful warfare







Aiming indirect (left) or direct (right) weapons is a fine, and fun, art. There's no countdown, which invites obsessing for minutes over every shot – both a blessing and a curse for gameplay speed

Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy

Format: **PS2, Xbox** Publisher: **Midway** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **September**

Previously in **E**136









Remote viewing allows you to safely scope ahead. TK surfing (top right) allows you to levitate over gaps and up to watchtowers



Trading faces

Psi-Ops is generous with its secrets, letting you unlock extra modes, missions and characters both by finding hidden garden gnomes and with codes from the internet. As well as comedy wigs, bikinis and cheats you get mini-missions: bite-sized puzzles of imaginative murder. Also available is a coop mode which splits controls across two joypads: one moving and aiming, the other firing and psi-ing.



Psi-Ops is unexpectedly pretty, with the plot whisking you from grimy train yards to marble-floored palaces. Character models aren't especially sophisticated, but animation is fluid and naturalistic

Of all the games reviewed this month, *Psi-Ops* is the one with the best excuse to be buggy. It's not just the headaches you can give the game engine by piling corpses up, blocking doors and jamming pistons, it's the chronic threat you pose to mission structure as you cheekily levitate yourself cleanly from one checkpoint to the next. And yet, despite the fact the game encourages you to mess around at every opportunity, you'll struggle to catch it with its pants down.

A rock-solid thirdperson blaster at heart, *Psi-Ops'* hook is the suite of psi powers at your disposal. Able to levitate people and objects, unleash fireballs and possess stooges, he strides the corridors and gantries more like a god than a crew-cutted lunk who's lost his memories (of course!) and doesn't know who to trust (not her!) as he uncovers a conspiracy darker than he could imagine (imagine!). Of these powers, it's telekinesis (or TK) that is the backbone of the game's ingenuity. Allowing you to bat enemies out of towers with an impatient flick of your wrist, it also lets you pin them wriggling against the sky as you perforate them with pistol shots, or fireball a pile of crates and lovingly dip each soldier in the flames in turn.

The balance could consequently be horribly off, but by ramping up the armour of the soldiers and taking advantage of well-designed levels, the game remains challenging. Psi powers also provide more elaborate puzzle sections that force you to think creatively to stitch together your own solution to an electrified floor or a room filling with gas. The control system deserves special mention, as it could so easily have been crude or overwhelming. Instead, it's sophisticated and sensitive, catering solidly enough for corridor-clearing run 'n' guns while allowing ambitious flights of TK fancy.

This is a short game, but not a mean one. Difficulty levels are intelligently calibrated, and an array of dinky unlockables (see 'Trading faces') complements extra play modes. Midway has also had the sense to give you the thing you want most: a playroom of death, complete with infinite health and giant wrecking balls. There are problems – the default pistol which partners your weapon of choice is drastically underpowered by the end, boss battles can frustrate, and the map is abysmal – but overall *Psi-Ops* is as imaginative as it is competent, and as considerate as it is demanding.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of ten

Mashed

Format: PC, PS2, Xbox Publisher: Empire Interactive Developer: Supersonic Price: £30 Release: Out now

Previously in E135

You can understand the excitement surrounding this release, an addictive and action-packed experience for up to four players from the team behind *Micro Machines 2* and, more indicatively, *Circuit Breakers*, but one that is essentially a slight reworking of such classic battling racers.

Similarly basic in aesthetics, structure and mechanic, *Mashed* features four-car, helicopter-viewed events disputed on 13 hazardous, shortcut-happy tracks where the objective is to drive far enough in front so as to 'drop' your opponents off the screen. Throw weapon power-ups into the rapid mix (the vehicles display fly-quick responses) and you have a foolproof, if familiar, recipe for dazzling multiplayer entertainment.

Predictably, the appeal of the singleplayer mode is limited. While the majority of the rounds are disputed over laps or 'kill' points, different tasks (such as the interception of a runaway car or shooting down a pesky helicopter) occasionally break up the homogeny. Mostly, though, battling against the AI only serves to highlight a distinct lack of balance and delicacy. Play any of the rounds more than once and the likelihood of obtaining the same result is slim. Luck, rather than skill, lies at the heart of success.

With three other joypads plugged in the game livens up immeasurably, becoming a wild, revenge-fuelled free-for-all (unless playing in teams) as players frantically attempt to outdrive, outwit and outgun each other at very silly speeds. In this mode the number of play options increases, too, with conventional multiplayer ventures (eg, capture the flag) made available, assuming they've been unlocked in the lacklustre singleplayer campaign. They help provide a focal point and a little structure to the events. The random element observed in the oneplayer mode never disappears, but the newfound social element of human foes all but makes this redundant.

Ultimately, the biggest concern is the game itself. In an age of digitised cities and physics-perfect handling it's difficult not to regard the immediate and seemingly universal popularity of a release displaying such an elementary dynamic as a sobering indication of the current gaming scene. That's food for thought, but for now *Mashed* deserves its success. It's not the most refined example (arguably still *Micro Machines'* territory) but is it excellent fun? Absolutely.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









For the most part, the courses are well designed, achieving a rare balance between length and a satisfying sense of rhythm





Though hardly innovative, the nine weapons available for pick-up (machine guns, mortars, missiles, oil slicks, flamethrowers, mines et al) ensure that multiplayer races (or rather battles) are never dull



Bangers and Mashed

In a brilliant touch, Supersonic has ensured *Mashed* differs from similar party-style games by remaining inclusive at all times. This means that if you get knocked out of a multiplayer round you can have the last word, moving a crosshair around the screen to unleash cruise missiles on the remaining competition rather than sitting quietly seething and staring at the television. It's a great way to further intensify an already ferocious environment, although what this will do for offscreen relations is another question, of course.

Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Atari** Developer: **Zombie** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**136











***Shadow Ops* is not difficult, but if you do die you have to trudge through long sections meeting the same tired enemies appearing at the same locations. Health packs are generous, so long as you look in every house**





The very first level treats you to an on-rails section depicting helicopters dispatching troops in a scene reminiscent of Black Hawk Down. It only lasts for 30 seconds, but it's the most dramatic, if clichéd, part of the entire game

Flashdance

The only effect in the game that shows any degree of imagination is the filter produced when a flashbang grenade explodes nearby: an instantaneous whiteout effect is followed by a speckled blur to represent your distorted vision. It gradually clears, but not before a bout of panicking and running into walls. You can get your own back by throwing flashbangs at the enemy, and watching as they fire spasmodically and turn on the spot can be quite amusing.

Had the plot taken its inspiration from The Boys From Brazil, *Shadow Ops* might have been interesting. It's curious that developer Zombie didn't include a cloning theme at all, as all the enemies within individual levels are identical, both in looks and behaviour. There's no explanation for this.

Bashing a publisher for risk avoidance is a familiar theme nowadays, but there's something more depressing at work here: *Shadow Ops* feels like a game put together by a team bored by the clichés of the genre and the special forces material it was given to work with. This quickly communicates itself to the player. What plot there is involves globetrotting from Syria to Kazakhstan to find the nuclear device of the subtitle, but it is largely irrelevant due to the back-to-basics game mechanics that fail to get you involved.

AI is sloppy, and although both enemy and buddy act out their pantomimes adequately at a distance from one another the flaws soon show through when engagements become more intimate. Standing next to a terrorist as he fires at one of your team off screen but fails to notice your presence is unforgivable. The general design and execution is ordinary at best, and never becomes good enough to paste over these intermittent cracks.

Levels are narrow and constricted rather than sprawling and intricate. Planting an explosive charge at prescripted points by pressing the 'A' button is about as complex as mission objectives get, and the few levels that introduce obligatory stealth sections are half-hearted – you get a silenced pistol and a sniper rifle and must headshot guards before they reach alarms. The number of explosive barrels is another indication of someone looking at the videogame design book of clichés for too long.

Grenades, both explosive and flashbang, can be thrown by pressing the black button but the small area of effect and a lengthy time delay make them more trouble than they are worth. This kind of imbalance could have easily been tweaked after some diligent testing with honest feedback. It's noticeable, for instance, that enemies suffer the effects of a flashbang for a shorter period than you do.

It may not be the most broken game ever made, but it's certainly one of the tamest. Technically proficient but creatively redundant, *Shadow Ops'* only unusual quality is that it can lull you into a torpor more rapidly than a hypnotist's wheel.

Edge rating: **Four** out of **ten**

Mario Vs Donkey Kong

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now (US) TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**138

Another month, another Mario. Seldom can the well-thumbed mascot have appeared in so many games yet been so far from having one to call his own. This handheld diversion is not that title, but it's surely as close to his roots as he's been since *Sunshine*'s void levels shot him from earthbound chores to a free-floating, free-wheeling toybox dream.

Mario Vs Donkey Kong reprises 1994's cult Game Boy version of *Donkey Kong*, which spun the venerable arcade game's handful of levels into a hundred, and its blunt action into a dense, subtle test of both wit and skill. This, then, is platforming from the old school, limiting the playing field to a screen or three, but cramming every square inch of it with springs, vines, fruit, dustbins, conveyor belts and malevolent toy monkeys: a variety pack of instant death.

The simple formula of the original – get key, reach door, repeat – has been expanded. On every other screen Mario must rescue a clockwork toy in his own image, stolen by the jealous ape. Get six of these and you must guide them, Pied Piper style, through a bonus level before facing off against Kong in a relatively imaginative and forgiving boss fight.

After six such worlds the 'plus' worlds are revealed, with a welcome focus on stringing the mini Marios along. Stiff high-score challenges on every level force a keen pace and risky routes to get bonus items; these in turn unlock a small set of expert levels. Like that singular modern classic in the arcade-platform genre, *Super Monkey Ball*, this game understands that the best possible reward is more punishment. It's not a limitless challenge, but the nugget-sized levels are perfect for mobile snack play, and it's been structured for longevity.

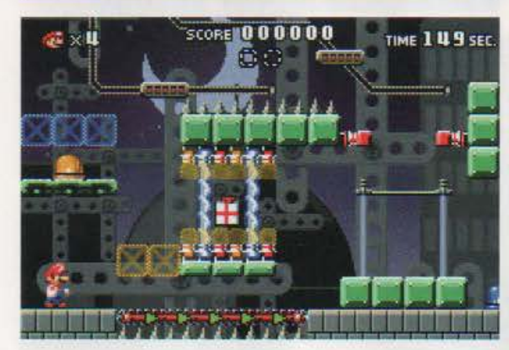
Mario Vs Donkey Kong may not be easy on the eye, but it's a delight to behold the system of checks and balances, rules and relationships at work here, some of them rooted deep in Mario lore. For the most part they're well exploited (especially the switchable, colour-coded blocks), exhibiting some invention and requiring some from the player in return. Some, but not quite enough to fully satisfy. The elegant sleight-of-mind that marks a great puzzle game is too scarce, the freedom afforded the player too fleeting. So ultimately this is not the triumphant return of a long-lost genre we were hoping for. It's just a tribute.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









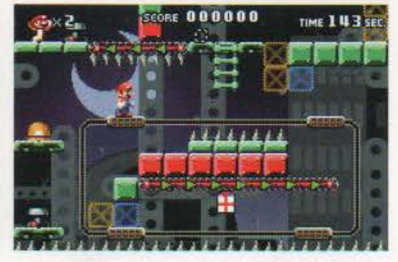


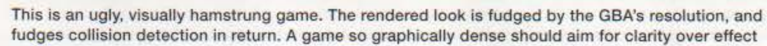












This is an ugly, visually hamstrung game. The rendered look is fudged by the GBA's resolution, and fudges collision detection in return. A game so graphically dense should aim for clarity over effect

Backflip symphony

Mario's verve and versatility are of utmost importance, and the game doesn't let him down. The tight confines have throttled back his momentum, but the payoff is a repertoire of moves that prefigured *Super Mario 64*'s acrobatics when they first appeared in Game Boy *Donkey Kong*. Though the control scheme is precise and has perfect, tactile logic, it's still possible for Mario's kinetic glee to get the better of him, and you. Which is exactly as it should be.

Espgaluda

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Arika** Developer: **Cave** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**135



Espgaluda's two characters follow traditional Cave rules – one has a stronger focused beam attack, the other a wider spread on their rapid-fire attack. Slightly less explicable is their transformation in Kakusei state into a twin sister/brother of the original character









There's a familiarity to *Espgaluda*'s screenshots that suggests the wall-of-bullets shooter is in the same corner of the same arcade where you left it ten years ago, but looks can be deceiving. It may appear unplayable without military-grade reaction times, but it's one of the most accessible, unrestricted games to grace the genre. It may be built on machined, mathematical precision, but it overflows with vibrancy in every raspberry swirl of bullets, gilded flywheel and storm of plate-glass wings.

Abandoning the chain-kill bonus of previous Cave shooters, *Espgaluda* introduces 'Kakusei', a surprisingly flexible speed-altering system. Destroying enemies at the game's normal speed harvests crystals, required to power the first Kakusei state. Activating this state halves the speed of enemy bullets – which allows precious extra seconds to slip between their obliterating streams. More importantly, slowed bullets are converted to score-boosting gold upon destruction of the enemy that fired them.

This first state inevitably drains your crystal stock and, when depleted, activating Kakusei enters its second state, in which bullet speed is terrifyingly doubled. There's no plasma-to-gold alchemy here, but white-knuckling it out provides a scoring bonus. In either state your character's favoured attack is strengthened, and being hit automatically activates the Guard Barrier, a protective counter-attack that must otherwise be manually operated.

Far less torturous in practice, the system's genius is that it makes each game a personal dance of risk and reward. Though levels are scored as a rhythm of cannon fodder for crystals and bullet-spewing sections for Kakusei, the tempo is entirely the player's. Tease out every bullet, sacrifice every millimetre of screen for the perfect gold rush, or save that heartbeat of slow time to plot an escape route through the next blossoming pattern. It's notable how quickly the game instils the confidence – or lunacy – to choose the backhanded protection of double-speed Kakusei over the one-hit kills of normal play.

Espgaluda affirms that the shooter is traditional, but not conservative. Though it could seem Cave is aptly named, unaware of a world that's moved beyond its 2D arcade board of choice, within the confines of that hardware it continually reinvents and innovates – and *Espgaluda* marks the pinnacle of that evolution to date.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of ten



Portable gaming

Arika's port is as accomplished as its work on *DoDonPachi Dai-Ou-Jou*, although some visual fidelity is lost in the forced resolution. Simulation Mode features again, allowing practice of sections under defined conditions (including 'Death: On/Off'). Included for Cave fans is Arrange Mode, which adds characters with fire patterns from 1998's shooter heartthrob *ESP.Ra.De* – *Espgaluda*'s spiritual sister title.





The notches on a boss's health bar indicate the moment a section will explode, allowing canny players to wait for the most intense bullet spread before entering Kakusei and delivering the last shot

Perimeter

Format: PC Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **1c** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**134

The idea of a terraforming RTS where the enemy are the embodied nightmares of the people who populate your mobile arcology (a flying ziggurat city called 'Frame') doesn't seem to be the kind of game that anyone in the west would have dared to develop. Lunatic space opera is an unfashionable genre these days, but Russian developer 1c has pulled it off.

The strategy itself is elegantly balanced and quite enormous – there's huge scope for players to get to grips with some clever tactics, once the initial teething problems of its unfamiliar dynamic have been overcome (a number of the campaign levels will leave players mystified as to quite what's going on, and since there's so much happening in the game as a whole there are a fair few missions that are little more than an introduction to a certain unit or game concept).

Once in motion, basic units morph into other, more useful units and can be transformed back again to be reused in some other form at a whim. This adaptability means that a large number of possibilities awaits the ambitious tactician. From tunnelling assaults to flying barrage defences, *Perimeter* relies on the imagination of players to become genuinely interesting. The core process of terraforming and using the eponymous perimeter shield to defend the base is a gradual but challenging task of micro management and split-second decision making. The shield is the ultimate weapon, defending the buildings with a wall of total invulnerability. Unfortunately, it also requires a vast amount of energy to keep it running.

The expansion of the base requires linked power nodes which must be jealously guarded, and constructing the necessary defences to fend off the relentless hordes will strike some players as laborious. The energy they channel can only be procured by terraforming, a slow and steady process that is beautifully represented by tiny mite-like robots that pock the landscape to reclaim the resources they need for their geological reconstruction. Once an area is reclaimed it must be built upon, weeding out the alien scourge that erupt from nodes on the surface.

Since this is one of the most peculiar titles of recent times, both in game dynamic and in presentation, it will pass many people by. Nevertheless, for those who bother to persist, it proves profoundly Russian and surprisingly engrossing.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten











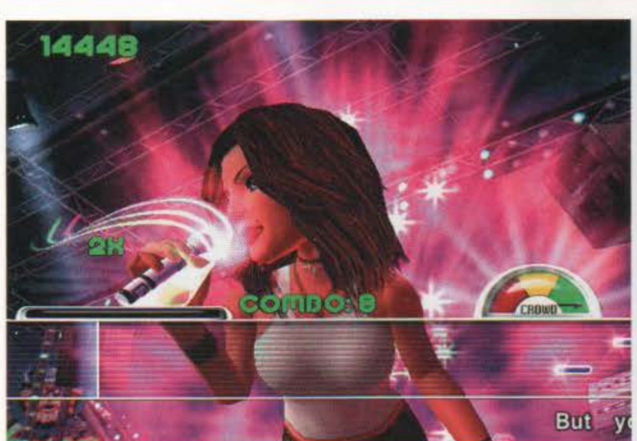
Connecting the nodes is the bread and butter of *Perimeter*'s energy management. Unit production and shielding do, in time, become rather more complex issues, so automated defences must be employed



Despite the vast scale and profound oddness, *Perimeter* is consistently beautiful. The way in which nanobots chew up the landscape to terraform the planet has an ugly, Crichton-esque vibe to it

Karaoke Stage

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **September 2004** Previously in **E**132, **E**135



Pull off enough combos, and the crowd starts to chap and cheer along. It's a genuinely exhilarating feeling that motivates you as soundly as a high score







If *SingStar* has already whetted your appetite for competitive crooning, the first few minutes of *Karaoke Stage* will either send your heart soaring or sinking. Where Sony created a sparkling piece of leisure software, Konami has made a videogame.

In the main game mode, each level's song choice is limited to four, structuring the challenge but alienating would-be entertainers. Pitch detection is accurate and, for the songs you know, Konami couldn't have provided a better arena for belting out the warbles you've perfected in the shower. But for the songs you don't know – and there are likely to be many – those warbles will be your undoing, capsizing an otherwise satisfying quest for high score. By preserving every nuance of the original, *Karaoke Stage* makes the learning of new songs laborious and intimidating.

Presentation is cuter than *SingStar's* icy chic, with a story mode seeing crowds gather to cheer as you rise from busker to superstar. But by placing restrictions on song choice, and by requiring a purist's replication of each track, Konami has made *Karaoke Stage* less of a game.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Athens 2004: The Official Videogame Of The Olympic Games

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Eurocom** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**135, **E**137

There was a time when the Olympics were about fierce, uncompromising brilliance. The modern games, as evidenced by the unthreatening impotence of the mascots, are all about inclusion. *Athens 2004* is very much of the latter school.

The game gains most of its character from the diligent creation of individual athletes from every nation. Lanky or squat, grinning or groaning, they give a real sense of connection as you go for increasingly unlikely gold. Although representing only a portion of the events that make up the games, the range – skeet shooting, hurdling, high jump, weightlifting, etc – has been chosen to guarantee variety. This is borne out in the controls, from button hammering on the track to the analogue sensitivity of the rings and the *Dancing Stage* familiarity of the gymnastics. Dance mat compatibility ensures multiplayer is hotly contested.

However, the variety of controls is overdone, making the game complex and confusing, and there's no customisable multiplayer. Nonetheless, this is a welcoming, capable and entertaining take on what gaming used to mean.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









The range of control schemes ensures singleplayer remains varied, but undermines *Athens'* usefulness as a party game. Some games, like archery, are self-explanatory, but others will have you reaching for the pause-menu info screens


















IK+





The martial arts beat 'em up with the trousers that fell down, IK+ inhabits a special place in the memories of many C64 owners

IK+'s addition of a third combatant was a masterstroke. The likes of *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and the C64 version of *International Karate* (but not the risible Spectrum release, with which **Archer Maclean** had no involvement) had already explored the possibilities inherent in one-on-one bouts on the then-current hardware. Maclean's third fighter gave *IK+* an entirely different 'feel': chaotic, fraught, a pace that made its peers seem pedestrian by comparison.

"Was the threeplayer concept present from the start?" echoes Maclean today. "Yeah, absolutely. I had the idea at the back end of the *IK1* development. I wanted to introduce the third player because it meant it was a free-for-all melee: one player against two computer players, two players against each other and a computer player, or two players against a computer

Original format: **C64**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Archer Maclean**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1987**









THE INSPIRATION

"I was a young, hungry programmer with a Ferrari to service (well, almost!), and I had the urge to write something even better than my C64/Atari 800versions of *International Karate*," says Archer Maclean when prodded on the inspiration behind *IK+*. "I wanted to essentially move fighting games away from the *Karate Champ*-inspired original and had to come up with something novel. I wrote C64 *IK1* from scratch originating all the code myself, developing it within the proven *Dropzone* game shell I owned, and with big doses of quality added to ensure a fun game. However, I knew at the end of *IK1* that with some machine code optimisation I could actually draw at least three players at once, not the traditional two, and this opened up all sorts of ideas. Around about the same time in mid-'86 I was approached by Activision, the distributor for System 3 products, to produce a sequel or a new title for them. Bear in mind I didn't receive a single penny in royalties ever, let alone a royalty statement, for *IK1*, and I watched it hit the number one spot in the USA with others getting fat off it... I obviously didn't want to be shafted twice, and so I happily licensed my new game code to Activision directly."

player – you were given the choice to cooperate."

The joy of *IK+* was its repertoire of moves, some of which were far more ambitious than other fighting games of the time. "One of my favourites is the headbutt, because it's quick – there are two frames of animation – and the speed is pretty spot on," says Maclean. "Another, and it was spectacular if you got it right, was the double face kick. It was actually inspired by Jackie Chan in The Cannonball Run. There's one point where he's having a fight with two bikers, and he suddenly jumps up and cracks both of them in the face at the same time. It's very, very impressive – and apparently it was real, he really did break one guy's jaw. I just looked at it and thought, wow, I've *got* to have that, and then spent ages trying to draw it."

Motion capture – sort of

Although he has no formal artistic training, Maclean was responsible for all of *IK+*'s visuals. "I've always been able to draw or animate cartoons, although it's often a very painstaking process," he admits. "There were loads of karate games around at the time, *Karate Champ*, *Fist* – which was a big favourite of mine – and a lot of them featured the same sort of moves. I wanted to do something that was different.

"Now, to do something like the backflip – which hadn't been put in a game before – I tried all sorts of things. One was just drawing it, but I couldn't get the flow of it right. Then I went out and bought a video camera, and filmed myself jumping around. That didn't work, either. I looked at hundreds of cartoons, karate films, all kinds of movies, looking for these moves I wanted. One was the backflip – I wanted it to be a way of quickly escaping or moving from one point to another faster than walking. Now, to get this, I needed footage.

"One afternoon I happened to be watching Grease with my girlfriend. At the very end of it there's a fairground scene... and in the background, sideways on, there's a guy doing a backflip. I watched it over and over and over, and said: that's it! A real person, doing a proper backflip. It was perfect."

Equipped with an expensive video recorder with a suitably static pause function, Maclean performed minor surgery on his television, opening and adjusting it in order to vertically 'stretch' the figure to the size he required for *IK+*. "I then placed a piece of cellophane over the TV, froze the frame, then drew an outline around it with a pen," he reveals. "I'd advance it by around two frames then draw the next piece of animation. I did dozens. I then took the cellophane and put it over my computer screen, painstakingly recreating each image in pixels. That then formed the primitive 'motion capture' which gave me the speed of body movement through the air in realtime. That's how I did it."

"I took the cellophane and put it over my computer screen, painstakingly recreating each image in pixels. That then formed the primitive 'motion capture'"

Fighting logic

The development of *IK+*'s AI was, though prosaic by comparison, no less efficient. "It was easy, basically," Maclean boasts. "In those days, it wasn't even called AI – we would have called it 'fighting logic', or something. The whole thing was based on look-up tables of what moves to use based on how far away the opponent was. The game obviously knows which move, if it were used, would lead to a direct hit at that point in time. For the easy difficulty level, right at the start, the computer fighters would, 90 per cent of the time, look at what the best move would be and then ignore it. As the level of difficulty increased that percentage would drop, until level 25 or thereabouts where it would be 95 per cent accurate. It worked beautifully."

One of *IK+*'s most memorable features was its excellent sound design. With background accompaniment provided by Rob



One of *IK+*'s many 'special' features involved the 'T' key, a favourite control for those on the receiving end of a particularly vigorous beating. Pressing it would cause all players not engaged in a particular animation sequence to drop their trousers

Hubbard's famous score – later recreated by Dave Lowe for the 16bit iterations – Maclean dedicated a lot of effort to polishing and perfecting its spot effects. "The one sound effect that everyone remembers is the shin kick, where you do a Bruce Lee-style sound," he says, before performing it with uncanny accuracy. "I spent a lot of time shouting into microphones," he laughs.

The 4bit samples of the C64 version – cleaned up for Amiga and ST releases – imbued every move, every successful blow, with a raw but satisfying power contemporary beat 'em ups rarely, if ever, seem to rival. One particularly clever piece of audio design could also be found in *IK+*'s ball-deflecting bonus round. As the speed of the projectiles increased, the pitch of the balls hitting the player's shield rises in a manner Maclean likens to *Space Invaders*, increasing the tension in a subtle but powerful manner. "I wanted the sound effects to make people sweat," he recalls.

Working initially with the limited C64 hardware, Maclean admits that he had to sacrifice certain features. One idea he had was that the plateau on which players fight had four views that would rotate between bouts. Players would watch the sun set on one side, before watching the moon disappear on the opposite.



A satisfying scene: knocking down two opponents in quick succession was, given *IK+*'s tremendous pace, was no mean feat

Disappointed with the 'dead' static backdrops of *International Karate*, he opted for a compromise: "I didn't want to waste RAM on static backdrops. That's why I went with the one backdrop, but animated it – and that added a lot of atmosphere."

Maclean also toyed with the prospect of a threeplayer mode: "I wanted to put that in, and the code could have coped with it," he recalls. "The problem was you only had two joystick ports, so one would have been on the keyboard – which, on a fast action game, I didn't want."

Bad language

Although the C64 original was packed with incidental animations and Easter eggs, Maclean added many codes and key commands to the 16bit versions, many of which revealed hidden messages. Some of these, he says, have yet to be discovered. "There are about 60. Some of them react to specific swearwords – and if you type in too many, the game would reset," he sniggers. Such incidental details seem to please Maclean greatly; you get the impression that he genuinely had fun developing *IK+*. What, looking back, is he most proud of? "I think it's the fluidity of the animation, and the way you felt connected to the moves you were doing," he states. "And the little things – the sloping shadows, the way the leaves fell from the tree and piled up on the ground. There was actually a maximum of 30 leaves that could be displayed, and when it got to that point, a little worm would crawl across. That's what the worm was for – to eat the leaves!

"I was *extremely* happy with *IK+*. I just used to sit there and look at it in wonderment at what I'd created. I knew that I'd created something really special. Few people saw it until the end, apart from a few people at Activision who had to see how I was getting on, and they couldn't get hold of it quick enough. Even now, 17 years on, people are still talking about it. Thousands and thousands of games have been released since then, and to have people remember it is amazing."



Note (and fondly recall) the manner in which certain blows would lead to different animations. Former *IK+* black belts should immediately realise that the competitor in blue was felled by an eye-watering punch to the stomach

This rather begs the question: with so many former devotees recalling it with fondness, can we expect a true sequel to *IK+*, to finally play the *IK++* that was rumoured to be in development? Is this likely?

"It's definite, full stop," replies Maclean, laughing. "I can't say yet what we're doing, but I *can* say that it's not going to be just another button-basher," he states. "I'm trying to go back to the good old days of simple controls, fluidity of motion and skill required… but with a big, big game behind it."





IK+'s collision detection was far better than many credit. Unlike many other 2D beat 'em ups, players needed to make direct contact with pixel flesh to score a hit – and that took practice

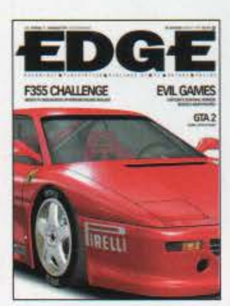






RESET

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 74, August 1999

"Evil Games" yelled the cover of the Ferrari-emblazoned **E**74, but it's OK, this wasn't some Daily Mail-style exposé on why videogames are destroying middle England. Instead, we'd been to visit Shinji Mikami and Keji Inafune (funny how history repeats) at Capcom to discuss survival horror. The visit confirmed that Capcom's corporate headquarters were indeed "a world away from Raccoon City," though an article in which we ran around shooting zombies might have proved even more interesting than a series of revelations about the never-to-arrive PlayStation1 *Onimusha*. "Enemies will look evil," said Inafune, "as if they come from hell." Very dark. Some day we'd like to fight pretty enemies, who look like they've come from the salon.

The issue's two main discursive features were 'Mr Tetris', in which we met Henk Rogers, not Alexey Pajitnov, and 'G@me On' where the future of online gaming was discussed and dissected. One of the commentators was Dreamcast supremo JF Cecillion, who explained: "I really believe in the social gaming aspect of Dreamcast." Meanwhile, we were trying to access websites with a Japanese import machine. Surprisingly, we couldn't get Hotmail to work, but teensluts.com proved no problem, and we printed a screenshot to prove it. Perhaps publicising that might have improved Sega's fortunes? 'With the right software, a Dreamcast could prove one of the essential buys of 2000', said the article. 'And not just for the hardcore gamer'. Yes, hardcore porn fans, this console is for you.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
'Anyway, Francis, when are we going to see *Everyone's A Wally 64*?' We start a petition for the return of one of videogaming's great franchises in a response to a reader letter

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"He's a very simple guy – his reward for Mario is that he doesn't have to wear neckties." **Henk Rogers** speaks affectionately about his friend, Shigeru Miyamoto

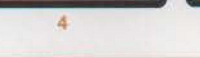
TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:
Outcast (PC/DC; 8/10), Dungeon Keeper 2 (PC; 8/10), V-Rally 2 (PS; 8/10), Ace Combat 3: Electrosphere (PS; 6/10), Ape Escape (PS; 7/10), Dynamite Cop 2 (DC; 5/10), Mechwarrior 3 (PC; 7/10), World Driver Championship (N64; 6/10), Braveheart (PC; 8/10), Dance Dance Revolution (PS; 5/10)


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1. *Onimusha*, before it was reinvented on PlayStation2
2. *Grand Theft Auto 2*, exploring gang mentality for the first time in the series
3. Sega president Irimajiri conceals Dreamcast's failings with statistics
4. The well-travelled Mr Tetris, aka Henk Rogers
5. An F355 feature...
6. ...and an *Outcast* advert. Nothing but a coincidence
7. Pete Fowler's delightful Super Furry GameBoy
8. PalmPilot *DoomCE*, a lawsuit waiting to happen
9. Lara Croft begins her career in the world of adult entertainment
10. *Ape Escape*: a 7/10 game 'aimed at the younger gamer' (but fun for all)

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email (stating 'Inbox' in the message header):
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Could somebody explain to me why *Beyond Good & Evil* failed to perform at retail? It's imaginative, distinctive, polished, great to look at and it's even got that Girl Power thing going on. I know Ubisoft's decision to release it in the Christmas rush was probably a factor but surely a game as individual as this one should stand out from the me-too crowd?

It seems that Ubisoft's ideas for increasing *Prince Of Persia*'s sales boil down to making it more like the huge crowd of dark, brooding thirdperson action titles and less like a unique combination of Arabian Nights meets *Ico*. Uniqueness appears to be considered a disadvantage because it makes it difficult for marketing people to write the copy on the back of the box. If a game can't convey its fundamentals in ten words or fewer, it needs to be adjusted to fit more easily into a pigeonhole.

Thank goodness for people like the Clover Studios team. As US and European publishers slowly assimilate all games into packages they can describe with a three-letter acronym, it gives me great hope to see people trying desperately to offer something new. Let's hope they manage to achieve some of their aims before market forces send them the same way as Looking Glass.
Chris Preston

You've said it yourself: surely a game as individual as *Beyond Good & Evil* should stand out from the me-too crowd. And it does. And in doing so it gives the average Joe 'the fear'. There's the rub.

I want to thank you for printing E3 coverage of our debut game, *Mario Pinball* for the GBA. However, your article lists Nintendo as the developer of the game, not us, Fuse Games Ltd, a recently formed UK development company. If you can correct this in your future ten-out-of-ten review, it would be much appreciated.
Adrian Barritt, Fuse Games Ltd

Our apologies. We blame that Sony party. Again.

'We want more exposure.' 'We demand acceptance.' 'The games industry is like the film and music industries – it should receive more respect!'... Stop. These statements should be followed by the question: 'Why?'

It is not easy to answer, is it? But why do we want these things? Is it for the money they would bring? No, because the money would go to the companies so they can make more games based on recognisable brands like *Tomb Raider*, so the investors would make a profit, much like a production company would churn out an identikit blockbuster or a record business would create a boy band. Would it be to bring recognition and heap kudos on the makers? No – why would we care if they won an award? Besides, if it were anything like the farce the Oscars and every other annual pat-on-the-back award has become, it would mean very little to anyone.

Would it be to allow gamers to be more open and honest about their passion? Close, but since when did film buffs and music enthusiasts have to campaign for it? If something was born into a niche, then it will most likely stay there. And this is where the bulk of the problem lies: where do games exist in society? Are they a hobby, a speciality, a form of entertainment, relaxation, even a form of art? It cannot be told where it lies, it just does, but who better to judge than the very people who support it?

Unfortunately, the attitudes of gamers are a mixed bag – now more than ever. Some people consider it their possession, their property; they do not want anyone outside of the community to touch it, especially the big companies like Sony and Microsoft. Others are indifferent, preferring to just enjoy it. Some push for this new identity with both hands. Overall, though, gamers would prefer games to be seen as something other than a preference. However, in contradiction, these same people were dubious about Sony's involvement in the industry, almost opposing it. The same happened with Microsoft, and no doubt will happen again.

But hold on – this is the exposure they craved, the big companies branching out into the fertile field of gaming. Old warhorses like Nintendo and Sega failed to bring the industry into the mainstream despite being dedicated to the market and it took Sony to bring that realisation closer than ever. Now, Sony is the undisputed king of the gaming world, and the PlayStation brand is the console of choice for both casual and dedicated gamers. Microsoft received more flack than Sony, and even though it failed to scale the heights of Sony, it has competed on an even keel with Nintendo, filling the space vacated by the cognoscenti's favourite, Sega. Is it a bitter irony that a conservative pastime wants more while changing little, without realising that the industry had been evolving all the time in spite of what they wanted, adapting to the environment around it before it became extinct? I wonder, will the staunch support adapt similarly, or go the way of the Segasaurus?
Ian Shaw

Those are some interesting questions. On the topic of winning awards, though, you should never underestimate the pride with which development types receive such things (and few more so than **Edge**'s EIGF gong – see p13).

The quest for realism is an illusion. Reproducing interactive photorealistic images is an unrealistic goal set by the 'experts' while the film industry makes and takes money from the videogame industry. Seen Troy or The Day After Tomorrow? Wouldn't have been possible without videogames. Early pioneers showed the world the power of electronic representation. Tron was considered a failure at the time of its release, but only because it was ahead of its time. It showed the world what was possible. Hollywood is taking the videogame industry for mugs, and it's time that changed. Videogames have to break free from the restraints of the film licence, and become recognised as an independent entity, like music is.

Thanks goodness for people like the Clover Studios team... Let's hope they manage to achieve some of their aims before market forces send them the same way as Looking Glass



John Dillon believes that 'advergaming', a theme explored by the likes of *Worms 3D*, should be a way of giving more benefits to consumers

If I sound pissed off, it's because I am. People at the top of their game in films, music and art will be remembered for ever more, while videogame producers will be remembered by a precious few.
Ghetto Buck

Thank you, Edge. Thank you for reporting rom E3 without using a single image of a scantily clad woman. It is truly commendable in an age were one cannot visit 'game site X' without being offered a link to the 'babes of the show'. Finally, an ssue I can share with my partner and not be embarrassed by the totally sexist attitude of many publishers/promoters. Thank you for not undermining the morality and intelligence of your eaders. Well done.
David Valjalo

Ah! Edge. What do I love about it?

The fact that a 260-word article occupies a double-page space – the rest being devoted to sublimely pleasing design aesthetics? Nagoshi veering from displaying unabashed enthusiasm for new paymasters Sega one month then devoting an entire column to his love of drinking the next?

No. It is the fact that, as a 40-year-old news journalist, **Edge** takes away the guilt of buying and loving games.

The raised eyebrows and withering stare of my partner when I unwrapped the Xbox which completed the final piece of the PC/PS2/ GameCube jigsaw. The having to lie about how much I have paid for games. **Edge** nullifies all this with its love and enthusiasm, its erudite wisdom. And now the wife (who teaches sociology and psychology) is begging me to supply her with **Edge** articles to use in lessons while, I might add, still decrying the value of videogames. Ah, well…
Andrew Hemsley

OK, that's enough **Edge** praise for one month.

I feel that the subject of 'advergaming' is a very interesting one. It seems at the moment that it is being sold to the gaming community on the basis that it will help smaller developers bring more interesting concepts to the market (mentions of *G-Police* and *Judge Dredd* seem bizarrely out of place here!). However, I am extremely doubtful that this will be the case.

I am not against the inclusion of product placement in games or indeed if a game wants to be 'brought to us by', but I would prefer it if these practices were employed in order to bring down the price of the game itself!

How will the gaming world seem in five years' time when the inevitable deluge of 'advergaming' changes the landscape? Will the Master Chief struggle to destroy the Covenant and the mysterious Polo to restore global minty breath? Or maybe Tippex for *Wipeout* or Andrex for the *The Sims: Houses Of Parliament Deluxe Edition*?

'Advergaming' is happening and in order for it to be embraced sympathetically like Graham Davies wishes (frontend, **E**137) perhaps developers could split the proceeds between themselves and the gaming community.
John Dillon

Developers sharing proceeds with consumers? Perhaps when Coronation Street starts sharing its Cadbury's revenue with its viewers, yes…

I completely disagree with Cack Hander (inbox, **E**137). Thinking that your writing hand affects playing games is absurd. If *Halo* had walk on the opposite stick to the one it does, anyone would be able to play it if they just spent the time to get acquainted with it. We learn initially difficult control set-ups all the time as gamers – it's part of what we do – but, moreover, there is no such thing as a non-ambidextrous player.

Example: I am a right-handed writer, but which hand do I use to do the complex tapping and rolling motions in games like *Virtua Fighter* or *Street Fighter*? My left. My right hand just sits there with the relatively pain-free task of tapping buttons, and that is an example where I am using the very muscles I use when I am writing – the ones in my wrist and fingers. Don't say you can't move one thumb equally as well as your other one, because every able-bodied person can.

When played on a PlayStation or Xbox controller, both your hands are doing essentially the same thing in first/thirdperson games – wiggling a stick around and squeezing a trigger with the index fingers. I don't complain that I have to use my non-writing hand to walk around, so you shouldn't complain that you have to use yours to aim.

The only argument that would carry weight in relation to left-handed gaming is when playing a game with a mouse, and then it's just a case of buying a different mouse, not unnecessarily moaning to game developers that already have enough to worry about.

Left-thumbed? Leave it out.
Jonathan Tilbrook

I'm really sorry to bother you, but we love the NDS pen featured in **E**138. Do you have a couple spare, by any chance? (We promise we won't sell them on eBay!)
Janan Jedrzejewski

Unfortunately, the clutch of NDS stylii we bagged at E3 have now all been pinched – by journalists working on **Edge**'s sister magazines, probably.

Oh my! Subscribe to **Edge** now and save £12 on the cover price? AND free delivery? AND receive a free limited-edition T-shirt? Why, I'd love to! Display my pride in **Edge** to all on the street? That sounds like a wonderful idea to me!

But wait! There are choices to be made here.

Navy or khaki? Khaki, please. Medium or large? Now, let's see, I'm 5'1", and a size 8, so that roughly translates to 'To Your Knees' or 'To Your Ankles'… Hmm. Looks like I won't be parading my love for **Edge** around the streets for all to see, after all.

Oh, well. At least I'll get a new nightdress. 
Louise Holden

Some people consider gaming to be their possession, their property; they do not want anyone outside of the community to touch it, especially big companies like Microsoft and Sony

Next month




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